

Legitimate Players? An ethnographic study of
academically successful Black pupils in a London
secondary school.

Nicola Anella Rollock

A thesis submitted to the Institute of Education, University of London
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

October 2006



Abstract

The low educational attainment of Black (notably African Caribbean) students has seldom been absent from the achievement debates of at least the last forty years. Yet, despite consensus amongst academics and policy makers that Black pupils do not attain equally in relation to their white peers there has been, to date, no single coherent governmental policy which has successfully closed the gap in achievement. Black pupils have become associated with a language of failure and disadvantage. Research that examines the opposite side of the equation – Black pupils and academic success – is rare. This research adopts an ethnographic approach to explore how staff and successful pupils at an inner-city London secondary school conceptualise academic success and seeks to understand the processes that might lead to the increased educational attainment of Black students.

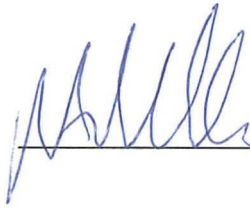
Findings indicate that while pupils perceive academic success to be within the grasp of all, staff regard it as unquestioningly dependant on a range of factors such as gender, individual characteristics, ability, social class, home environment and family background. In addition, the reported display by mainly Black boys of what is defined as “Black street subculture” is reconstituted as a threat to school norms and at odds with the portrayal of the academic profile. Using a Bourdieuan analysis, it is argued that pupils seen to fit the academically successful profile are regarded as having legitimacy within the school context and therefore encouraged to succeed. Black pupils, due to their lack of “appropriate” capital, are not regarded as having legitimacy and are less likely to be encouraged to succeed. Black male pupils in particular are disadvantaged by their positioning by female staff as conspicuous, sexualised objects of threat. It is therefore argued that academic success remains a challenge for Black (male) pupils, even for those originally defined as achieving.

Declaration

I hereby declare that, except where explicit attribution is made, the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own.

Word count (exclusive of appendices and references):
98457 words

Signed:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Nicola Anella Rollock', written over a horizontal line.

Nicola Anella Rollock, October 2006

Acknowledgements

I must of course thank the staff and pupils of Metropolitan High School for giving up much of their valuable time to share their views with me. Particular thanks must also be extended to my contact at the school, the headteacher and the secretaries who responded wonderfully to my requests for information.

I am also most grateful to Michelynn Lafleche, Director of The Runnymede Trust and Professor Alistair Ross, Director of the Institute for Policy Studies in Education at London Metropolitan University for their generous understanding and support as I managed that wonderful balancing trick of full time employment with PhD study. I have, on occasion, been able to work on a part-time basis to give the research the attention that it deserves. This undoubtedly would have been more challenging, stressful and probably impossible without financial assistance from The Errol and Nita Barrow Educational Trust, The Walcot Foundation, The St. Andrew's Holborn Charity and those other charities who have asked to remain anonymous. I cannot begin to thank them enough for their support, interest and encouragement in my work. I am, of course, extremely indebted to The Hyam Wingate Foundation for the award of a scholarship, which gave me the invaluable opportunity to escape to Paris for six months to concentrate on writing the first draft of my thesis on a full-time basis.

Thanks also to Joseph Jabbar for his comments on an earlier draft of one of the chapters; to Derick Lapite who read with unlimited kindness, enthusiasm and critical thought a significant portion of the thesis; and, to Ronald McCalla for his formatting advice. I must also thank Professor Diane Reay for her feedback on the theory chapter and Dr Barbara Cole for her comments as my independent reader. I would also like to express my warmth, empathy and gratitude to the many students with whom my life became intertwined during the course of this research and for those who shared too many late nights and early mornings in the Doctoral Students' Common Room. Thanks also to the Doctoral school and to Neal Carr in Educational Foundations and Policy Studies for so patiently managing my endless queries.

Finally and most importantly, my deepest thanks must go to my supervisor Professor David Gillborn for engaging with me in some wonderfully stimulating conversation and debate, for his advice, comments, encouragement, humour, warmth and understanding during some difficult personal times and throughout the course of the entire research.

‘ “Any time a white deals with you”, his father would tell the family, “no matter how well intentioned he may be, there is the presumption of intellectual inferiority. Somehow or other, if not directly by his words then by his facial expression, by his tone of voice, by his impatience, even by the opposite – by his forbearance, by his wonderful display of *humaneness* – he will always talk to you as though you are dumb, and then, if you’re not, he will be astonished.” “What happened, Dad?” Coleman would ask. But, as much out of pride as disgust, rarely would his father elucidate. To make the pedagogical point was enough. “What happened,” Coleman’s mother would explain, “is beneath your father even to repeat.” ’

Roth (2000: 103)

Chapter contents

Title page	1
Abstract	2
Declaration	3
Acknowledgements	4
Quote	5
Contents	6
Chapter 1 Introduction	11
Beginnings	11
Sociological Influences	12
The Political Agenda	13
Black students and academic success	15
Chapter 2 Literature Review	21
Introduction	21
Terminology	21
Ethnicity	21
Race	23
On being Black	23
On being British	24
Black children in British schools – a historical perspective	25
Assimilation	25
Integration	26
Multiculturalism/antiracist perspectives	27
Thatcherism	28
Present problems and solutions	29
School performance	31
The role of education	31
Criteria for success	32
Black Caribbean pupils achieving A* to Cs	33
Fig. 2.1: Percentage of pupils obtaining five or more A*-C GCSEs by ethnicity	34
Fig. 2.2: Percentage of Black pupils achieving five or more A* to C grades at GCSE and equivalent in England, 2004, 2005	35

Class, gender and ethnicity	35
Fig. 2.3 Attainment inequalities by race, class and gender, England & Wales 1988-1997	35
Exclusions	36
Racism	38
Culturalist and Structuralist perspectives	41
Culturalist contender or structuralist supporter? The role of New Labour.	43
How pupils cope with school	44
Doing school	44
Discussion	46
Chapter 3 Methodology	48
Research focus and questions	48
Ethnography	49
Reflexivity	50
Research environment	52
Identifying a research site	52
Metropolitan High School	53
Participants	53
Data collection and analysis	54
Role of the researcher	54
Observation	56
Interviews	56
Secondary data	57
Analysis	57
Ethics	57
Chapter 4 Academic Success	58
<u>Staff</u>	
Definitions of academic success	58
Academic success as expected academic attainment	58
Academic success as exceeded attainment	60
Academic success as more than just grades – or how the government has got it wrong	61
Perceptions of pupils' definitions of academic success	65
Determinants of academic success	68
Pupil Characteristics	69
Family structure and home environment	72
Social Class	73
Ability	74
<u>Pupils</u>	
Definitions of academic success from pupils	77
The importance of succeeding academically	78
Determinants of academic success	79
Perception of teachers' definition of academic success	81

<u>Discussion</u>	84
Chapter 5 Academic Failure	86
<u>Staff</u>	
Pupil Characteristics	86
Boys	87
Black boys	88
Relationships with staff	90
Key to academic success	91
Valuing education	91
Parents' evenings	93
Family background	95
Social class	95
Family composition	97
Ethnicity	98
<u>Pupils</u>	
Characteristics of less academically successful students	100
Addressing academic failure	102
<u>Discussion</u>	104
Chapter 6 Dress and Demeanour	105
School guidelines on uniform and behaviour	105
<u>Staff</u>	
Implementation of school uniform guidelines	106
No link between appearance & dress	108
Indirect interpretations of student subcultures	108
Explicit interpretations	110
A complex interpretation.....	116
<u>Pupils</u>	
Responses to school uniform implementation	118
Nathan Johnson	119
Explicit interpretations	122
Complex interpretations	123
Additional Survival Strategies/Keeping your head down	125
<u>Discussion</u>	126
Gender & ethnicity of interviewed staff	127

Pupils' gender	128
Consequences of fear	128
Chapter 7 Differential Treatment	130
Fig. 7.1: summary of staff constructions of the academically successful student...	131
Fig. 7.2: Academically successful students' construction of academically successful students	131
Assessment and the National Curriculum (Table of attainment targets)	131
Fig. 7.3: Attainment targets and level descriptions for the Nation Curriculum.....	132
<u>Staff</u>	
The Formal System	132
The Education System	133
Intake and test predictions	134
Setting by ability	138
Mixed ability teaching groups	142
Informal Markers of differential treatment	145
Gender and ethnicity	145
Academically successful and less successful students	148
All success is successful	149
<u>Pupils</u>	
Work	154
Discipline	156
<u>Discussion</u>	159
Advantages of appropriating the correct pupil identity	159
Disadvantages of not fulfilling the ideal learner identity	160
Importance of teacher-pupil relationships	160
Chapter 8 Structural barriers to academic success	163
<u>Staff</u>	
School level concerns	163
Government	170
Wrong definition of academic success	170
Performance tables	173
Class size	175
Paperwork	176
Staff shortage	177
Education systems	178
<u>Pupils</u>	
Negative experiences	181
Ineffective handling of discipline	181

Poor teaching styles	183
Bad manners	185
Positive experiences	186
Good rapport	187
Fair treatment	188
<u>Discussion</u>	189
Chapter 9 Using Bourdieu to theorise academic success	192
Introduction	192
Bourdieu – overview of key concepts	193
Field	193
Habitus	194
Capital	195
Bourdieu in practice	195
Bourdieu at Metropolitan High	197
The relationship between Metropolitan High, the local context and central government	198
Ethnicised subcultural practices and the media	199
Fig. 9.1 Hooded figures, Sunday Times	201
Pupils and academic success	205
Racialised and gendered perspectives on academic success	207
Fig. 9.2 Dynamite Misses. Sunday Times	210
Defining and redefining academic success	211
When Black pupils succeed	212
Fig. 9.3 Relationship between established pupil profile and predicted grades	213
Chapter 10 Discussion	214
Summary: Legitimate players?	214
Culturalist versus Structuralist approaches: Another way	215
Key Strengths & Limitations of present research	216
The Future: Achieving real academic success?	217
Quote	220
References	221
Appendices	235

Introduction

"Good education shouldn't depend on your class, colour, background or birth. It should be each child's start in life. Their chance to make the most of themselves. Once they have that chance it's up to them. But to deny them that chance is the greatest personal and social injustice imaginable." Tony Blair (2004)¹

This research has been informed by my role as a researcher and as a Black woman.

Beginnings

This research began as a reaction to the psychological literature that I was reading in 1999 (my first degree and research posts were in Psychology). Almost every paper or article I read prefixed "Black" by disadvantage, failure, underachievement or poverty. The headlines in newspapers said the same. I thought about my Black friends and their families, I thought about my family. It was true that I grew up in a working class household but we did not live in poverty. We were not disadvantaged. I thought about the private school to which my parents had, in their commitment to education and all that it could potentially offer, sent me and my sister. I reflected again on the meaning of disadvantaged. It was true that we did not have a second home in the south of France and that my parents did not drive a four by four like many of the parents of the white girls in my class but I understood that my parents had moved me from my local state primary school so that I would *not* be disadvantaged by some of the white members of staff who, they had been informed by a Black teacher, were racist. They had moved me so I would not be disadvantaged by my form teacher who was particularly stringent about marking my work and about restricting me from advancing to the next stages of reading. If I was not disadvantaged, if my Black friends had not been and were not disadvantaged why did I only read about disadvantaged Black families?

My schooling intrigued me, even as I was going through it. I have a vivid memory of music lessons being almost entirely centred on four girls (the Clique, as we used to call them) one of whom had blond shoulder length hair which she tossed with annoying flirtatious frequency as she bantered with our male music teacher who readily entertained and even encouraged her. Their discussions sometimes focused on music but could be about anything and they would laugh, exchange news about Isabelle's parent's latest classical buy and latest travel plans while the rest of the class impatiently willed the time to speed by. Interestingly, Isabelle rarely handed in homework. When this happened Mr Music Teacher would just smile at her and tell her to hand it in next time. Everyone else was reprimanded. One day

¹ Blair, T. (2004) *Radical reform is the route to Social Justice*. Speech presented at the opening of Bexley Business Academy in Kent. 18 September.
www.number-10.gov.uk/output/Page4492.asp (accessed 18/01/06)

the class was supposed to be working in silence. Mr Music Teacher had written the name of a musical form "leitmotiv" (I still remember it) on the board. Intrigued by the pronunciation I repeated the word, in whisper, to my friend sat on my right. I was immediately pounced upon by Mr Music Teacher who demanded to know what I had said. "Leitmotiv", I answered sheepishly, "the word on the board". After a millisecond of glaring at me, and reiterating that we were supposed to be working in silence, he sent me to stand outside of the classroom, for the first and only time during my time at that school. I remember feeling really angry. I remember feeling powerless which upset me even more. The punishment did not make sense. It did not seem just for what had happened. True I had spoken when I was not supposed to but it was one word and it had been about work. I could not help thinking that had I been Isabelle, had I been able to toss blond hair and joke about my latest skiing trip, I would not have been shouted at and would have been spared the humiliation of standing outside the classroom door. I hated Mr Music Teacher after that and stayed out of his way.

It was partly a disenchantment with the psychological literature and partly this kind of school experience that made me turn to the sociological literature on race and education. I was looking for something, anything positive about young Black people, their families and schooling. I was also looking for something (I did not have a vocabulary for it at the time) about the hidden rules and codes of succeeding at school. While everyone was encouraged to succeed at my school (for example, it was taken for granted that you would apply to university and/or polytechnic) there were some who seemed, not simply on account of their academic excellence, to be positioned more favourably or desirably (Youdell, 2003) than others. Isabelle being one example.

Sociological Influences

The sociological perspectives were very different from those in psychology tending to observe and critique classroom practice and general school processes (e.g. Wright, 1986; 1987; Mac an Ghaill, 1988) and the concerns of the wider Black community (Coard, 1971; Gibson & Barrow, 1986) compared to the earlier papers that I had read that seemed to regard Black British (and African American) families as though they existed in a laboratorial vacuum outside of the influences and constraints of society (e.g. Seigner, 1983; Johnson, 1992; Halle, Kurtz-Costes & Mahoney, 1997). While I accepted and welcomed Mac an Ghaill's (1988) focus on "young, gifted and Black" pupils I found the categorisations of pupils as pro-school/anti-school and as resisting the process of school while also accepting the goals of education, too simplistic. It still felt somewhat pathological. I was encouraged, though somewhat saddened by Gillborn's (1990) successful Black pupil Paul Dixon who described how he went out of his way to avoid a particular teacher (with whom he had already fallen out) as a way of minimising conflict with him. Perhaps I was saddened because it reminded me of my own experience but I was also concerned by this unspoken

act of survival that this pupil engaged in which, bearing in mind the emphasis placed on positive teacher-pupil relationships in the educational literature would also disadvantage him (e.g. DfES, 2003a). I wondered whether there were any other strategies that pupils employed in order to “do school”. I wondered whether Paul’s teacher was ever aware of the way in which that initial moment of discord between them affected Paul and, if it were brought to his attention, whether it would have made any difference to the way in which he administered discipline in the future.

The Political Agenda

Aside from reading the academic literature, I increasingly collected and read pamphlets, booklets, folders and advice published by Ofsted, the (then) Teacher Training Agency, the teaching unions and independent charities all centring on the educational performance and/or behaviour of Black pupils. I, especially in the early days of registering for this doctorate, attended conferences, seminars, meetings and workshops all focusing on the same subject area. While there was some variation in perspective, depending on political approach and agenda, there were a number of key messages that were essentially the same. Crucial to raising the achievement of Black (and minority ethnic) pupils and being an effective school were strong leadership, high teacher expectations, a diverse and engaging curriculum, a good home-school relationship and monitoring and addressing racism (e.g. see Ofsted, 1994; TTA, 2000). Yet despite this supposed magic formula Black pupils still were still not sharing in the yearly improvements at each key stage (Gillborn & Gipps, 1996; Gillborn & Mirza, 2000; DfES, 2004a; DfES 2005a) and were still being permanently excluded from school in disproportionate numbers (DfES, 2003b, 2004b, 2005b).

I have been struck by the way in which the government refuses to acknowledge that blanket policies ostensibly implemented with the best of intentions can have disastrous consequences or are inconsequential for particular minority ethnic groups. The 1999 strategy to reduce permanent school exclusions by a third by 2002 was a clear example of this (DfEE, 1999a) since while exclusions were reduced overall the same patterns of inequality were evident with Black boys still being disproportionately represented in the figures (DfES, 2003b).

This simplistic and, I would suggest, naïve approach is clearly reflected in the following exchange between the then Secretary of State for Education Charles Clarke (CC) and John Humphries (JH), during an interview for Radio 4’s Today programme:

JH: Why if teaching is getting better, are many of these children who are getting their results today, not showing improvements in the same way?

CC:the function of the education system in our opinion is to try and enable to every pupil to do well and to do better and there are those people who come along every year who say

no no no, not that's not right the function of the education system is to choose some specific elite every they bemoan general successes, what David Milliband is saying is let's applaud success where it happens and try to improve our performance where we need to and we do need to.

JH: Surely we have to - and this is something again a point that employers make again and again - we have to perhaps to reassess what success is. You may be successful if you get a first at Cambridge, you may be successful if you go to a decent redbrick university and do pretty well there. You may be successful if you become a plumber without any great academic qualifications.

CC: I think that's quite true I think that feeds the point that I was making earlier on John. *Success in my book is enabling every individual to fulfil their own aspirations in what they can achieve for themselves. Failure is when children don't succeed in doing what they could do for themselves and really achieve fulfilment for themselves. So our ambition for success is to ensure that every child gets the start in life that they need, fulfilling themselves as best they can, whatever level it may be. Now my big crusade as it were is that every child has great success within them and let's ensure that the education system enables them to meet those successes and fulfil themselves.*

JH: But if you set as a priority, as you have done, fifty percent of children to by a particular date, aren't you saying to those other fifty percent who failed to do that you haven't succeeded.

CC: I think that the whole hierarchical approach that has been very damaging over the years in this country, which says that anybody who gets over a certain level is wrong. That only they are regarded as successes. Success can be defined for everybody in a different way and I think that's the way to do it. Now if you ask about the fifty percent university target - that's what many other countries are doing now and more important children are able to do that

JH: But it's a sort of one size fits all approach.

Interview: Thursday 21st August 2003 Radio 4 Today Programme [emphasis added]

This extract serves as a useful basis for continuing to describe some of the rationale that informs this thesis. Humphries' initial question can also be read as "Why if teaching is getting better, are *Black children*², who are getting their results today, not showing improvements in the same way?" This is an important question since like Maud Blair (1998) I share the view that there is no intrinsic reason why particular groups should be less likely to attain educationally (see also Gillborn & Youdell, 2000: 4) unless they are being treated differently as a group. Yet the historical and contemporary picture viewed in relation to Black pupils is that they continue not to achieve well at school.

Humphries' second point about reassessing the meaning of success while seeking to challenge dominant societal discourse and perception overlooks the key consideration that the very profile of the pupil who is likely to go to Cambridge compared to a redbrick university, who is likely to gain vocational compared with "academic" qualifications again

² Of course this can be said of some other minority ethnic groups who also do not tend to share in the yearly improvements across key stages, notably Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Traveller groups (DfES, 2005a).

varies according to the social class and ethnicity of the pupil, with those from working class and Black and minority ethnic backgrounds significantly represented in newer universities and vocational courses. I consider these issues and the wider social policy climate in relation to Black (and where possible Black Caribbean) groups in the **Literature Review**. I then narrow the focus to examine the historical (that is from the late 1950s) and contemporary data regarding the schooling experiences and achievement of Black pupils and the way in which the government has sought to respond. The introduction, during the course of this research, of an amendment to the 1976 Race Relations Act (RR(A)A, 2000) which places an emphasis on recognising the entrenched discriminatory practices within public bodies offered a fleeting glimmer of hope that some serious questions would be asked about school practices and the ways in which they affect Black and minority ethnic groups overall and Black (Caribbean) groups in particular. These questions, about how policies and institutional processes affect varying ethnic groups, remain unasked by the government's school inspection body Ofsted and by the body that enforces the Act, the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE). Charles Clarke in his statement here about success and failure is clearly not asking these questions. His success is based, I argue, on a problematic notion of equality of opportunity that assumes once every child is given the best and the same start in life there is no reason for them not to achieve. No attention is paid to the actual teaching and learning process which is assumed to be the same for every child. Failure, and this is particularly apparent in Tony Blair's quote with which I started the chapter, is located as being the fault and responsibility of the child (and by implication their family) for not making the most of the opportunities that have been made available to them. This, I have to reiterate, is despite the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 which recognises and seeks to address through its statutory duties the existence and prevalence of institutional racism. This really is a "one size fits all approach" that is failing Black children.

Black pupils and academic success

So it was in this rather messy and contradictory political climate, with successive governments guilty of continually failing Black pupils that I asked the question how is it that some Black pupils actually manage to achieve? I felt that by examining success within the Black community I would not only challenge the pathological discourse surrounding Black people (also Osler, 1999) but that I would be able to offer a new perspective to the educational debates on the low attainment of Black pupils. I have been particularly concerned with:

- 1 How do staff and academically successful pupils' construct academic success and failure?

- 2 How do academically successful pupils understand their experience of school?
How are these experiences shaped by the ethnicity and/or gender of the pupil?
- 3 What are the implications of these findings for Black pupils achieving academically?

Following the Literature Review, I begin in **Chapter 3 - Methodology** by describing the research focus and questions in detail and the reasons for adopting an ethnographic approach to the fieldwork. I outline some of the key arguments that have characterised the methodological literature regarding the validity of the claims in school-based ethnography regarding inequalities in education. I find Hammersley's (1993) insistence on "methodological commonsense" problematic and tainted by his unquestioned powerful positioning as a white middle class male. I share Gillborn's (1998) view that good ethnography is not about revealing an explicit truth but about presenting a convincing case for the argument being made. I also very strongly support hooks (1991) demands that any practitioner engaged in studying cultures must engage in a reflexive, critical interrogation of their own positioning and beliefs as a way of acknowledging the lens through which the research is being analysed and, as a way of engaging, reflecting and learning from the research process. I spend considerable time in this chapter considering what I took to the field as a researcher and how others might position me. I am struck by the way in which I balanced on an uncomfortable tightrope as I attempted to occupy a researcher space and gather "convincing" data and as I struggled with being confronted by subject areas that did not sit easily with me as a Black woman committed to equity and critical thought.

In this chapter, I explain how original intentions to focus on an average performing mixed sex, inner city secondary school had to be revised following declines from a number of schools to take part in the study. The one school that I refer to using the pseudonym Metropolitan High ("Met." in abbreviation) that agreed to take part performed slightly below the national average at Key Stage 4. Retaining access to the school felt extremely precarious as I negotiated and renegotiated various stages of the fieldwork with the headteacher. It was this stringent gatekeeping that resulted in my foregoing the classroom observation that I had wanted as part of the research. Instead I attended achievement evenings, staff meetings, and spent considerable time both observing and taking part in staff room activity and discussion.

Individual interviews took place with Year 9, 10 and 11 pupils from a range of ethnic backgrounds who the school had defined as academically successful. Both teaching and support staff were interviewed as well. A key starting point for these interviews, since I was interested in how Black pupils became academically successful, was to understand how academic success was defined. This forms the basis of **Chapter 4 – Academic Success**. As will become apparent, while staff begin by ostensibly supporting an *inclusive success*

agenda in which everyone is regarded as successful irrespective of the grades they achieve, they simultaneously work to and espouse an *exclusive success* in terms of the achievement of A* to C grades, in line with Gillborn & Youdell's (2000) A to C economy and which only certain pupils are perceived as capable of achieving. Pupils capable of this exclusive success are perceived to be girls, hard-working, focused and likely to live in calm, organised two parent households where they have access to good learning resources. They wear the right uniform, engage in constructive, analytical debate with staff and do not highlight their individuality in school. Academically successful pupils themselves, by contrast, describe a more simplistic notion of success admittedly in terms of high academic grades but as available to anyone once they are focused, motivated and work hard.

One way of further clarifying the ways in which staff and pupils at Metropolitan High construct academic success is by exploring their perceptions in **Chapter 5 of Academic Failure**. In this chapter, earlier staff claims about a commitment to inclusion come under question as I show how due to the catchment area and particular profile of the pupils who attend Met. staff feel they are ill-positioned ever to achieve success in terms of A* to C grades at GCSE. Pupils with special educational needs, boys and Black boys are portrayed for various reasons as likely to fail educationally. Pupils who are unable to engage in critical conversation with staff are also seen as less likely to achieve. Much is made of the family and home environment which is seen by a number of staff as playing a crucial role in shaping pupils' attitudes to school and value of education. Pupils from single parent families and who have a number of siblings are portrayed as living in chaotic, disorganised homes with few resources and little space to study all of which are seen by staff to further dampen the pupil's likelihood of academic success. As with academic success, pupils regarded academic failure in quite simplistic terms. They saw it as likely if pupils were easily distracted by peers or other activities and, moreover, if they did not work hard.

One of the topics that I had not anticipated would arise when I began this research, due to its focus on academic success, was the way in which staff views about school performance would be embedded in a discourse about a "Black street culture". While I recognise that this began as an exploration about Black pupils and academic success I was very much led by the data so in **Chapter 6 – Dress and Demeanour** I examine the various rather unsophisticated ways in which predominantly female staff make a causal link between particular forms of attire, namely hooded tops and Nike clothing, an interest in rap music and being disinterested in schooling and the acquisition of qualifications. These discourses are steeped in a sexualised stereotypical Othering and fear of Black male pupils and, as I will show, staff offer little interrogation of how they arrive at their conclusions or of alternative forms of analysis. This data is all the more striking since I rarely broached the subject of "race" leaving it as an issue that staff would raise if they considered it relevant.

While the subject of appearance arose during conversations with the academically successful pupils they tended to focus on school uniform and how staff implemented the rules about uniform. A noteworthy finding, though it is reported with some caution since the number of pupils was very small, was that while some Black girls shared staff views about successful pupils looking neat, some Black boys rejected this association saying that success was about the grades someone achieved and not the way they looked. Some of these boys (both neatly and untidily dressed) also spoke of the way in which manipulating uniform helped to minimise the likelihood of being labelled as academically successful and therefore of being teased by peers.

In **Chapter 7 – Differential Treatment**, I attempt to draw together staff and pupil constructions of the profile of academically successful and less successful pupils and examine how these different sets of pupils experience school. Consideration is given to formal in-school processes that legitimately facilitate differential treatment of pupils such as setting by ability and mixed ability teaching and staff views on each teaching method. I note how staff who advocate setting highlight the teaching benefits and dismiss the possible negative impact on pupils in contrast to supporters of teaching in mixed ability groups.

The chapter also discusses the ways in which staff treat pupils differently according to what I have termed informal markers such as gender and ethnicity. Using anonymised accounts to further protect staff identity, I reveal the ways in which some staff are reported to discriminate against particular groups of pupils both verbally and with regards to fixed views about the extent of their academic attainment. Some staff also admit to personally treating pupils differently on occasions simply due to whether or not they had been categorised as academically successful. In brief, pupils who are positioned as academically successful are more likely to be trusted, to be given opportunities to explain themselves and to be given more chances to demonstrate their trustworthiness compared to less successful peers who are generally regarded as guilty before even opening their mouths. These differences in treatment are remarked upon by the pupils in this research as being unfair and inconsistent. Differential treatment with regards to pupils of differing levels of attainment was, in one particular example, seen to be unnecessary and patronising. The meting out of discipline was regarded as random and often more stringently imposed on those pupils who like themselves who had been defined as academically successful. This was because, these pupils felt, such behaviour was regarded as out of character and also, I argue, may have been influenced by a staff desire to protect the high achieving status of such valuable students. While the amount of staff time and attention directed at successful pupils seemed to vary, it is clear that it is not administered consistently across all pupils.

In **Chapter 8 – Structural barriers to academic success**, I explore how staff feel they could be better supported to improve academic achievement. Using both interview and

observational data I demonstrate how staff feel that a lack of support and communication amongst the senior management team affects morale and enthusiasm for their work. Both discipline and monitoring of pupil progress are largely regarded as inconsistent and ineffective with mood further depressed by the fact that the headteacher is not regarded as friendly or approachable. Staff remain critical of the way in which the government defines and advertises academic success in school performance tables and of the size of the classes they have to teach. Evident in these complaints is an overwhelming sense of dissatisfaction with the bureaucracy of teaching (the School Workforce Remodelling had not yet taken effect) and an implicit longing for the “right”, high status pupils who would, allegedly, be easier to teach. Particularly noticeable in this chapter and indeed throughout the chapters is the way in which staff at Metropolitan High do not situate themselves as having any responsibility or agency in affecting teaching and learning. Possible reasons for pupils’ lack of academic success and any ways in which it might be ameliorated are seen to be located with the pupils themselves, their families, the poor working environment or central government. While I suggest that this may be reflective of low staff morale, it suggests a number of interesting questions about what staff see as the purpose of their role.

There are a number of aspects of this thesis that have been challenging for me not least the ways in which I had to manage my feelings and views about what I experienced while in the field (see especially Methodology and Chapter 6) not all of which I have been able to report here for reasons of confidentiality. One of those challenges has been about finding a theoretical framework in which to situate, explore and discuss the findings of this research. This thesis is about race. It is about some of the finer nuances of everyday racism that are traditionally missed from race equality policies, from media reports and general societal understanding of racism. It is about a racism with which I am very familiar, which is a reality of my everyday life. As a result, I struggled for a long time with why I needed a theory to give legitimacy and academic status to a process that already had legitimacy for me and which continues to shape my existence and that of many people I know. I revisited the work of Marx, Weber and their present contemporaries, especially Stuart Hall and Stanley Cohen. I was mainly impressed by their analyses around cultural representation and codes and make mention of Cohen’s (2002) notion of a “moral panic” in Chapter 9 when discussing the theoretical interpretations I have made about the findings presented in this thesis. I also appreciated various aspects of Critical Race Theory and the license that it affords to storytelling as a way of capturing and reflecting the lived experiences of Black and minority ethnic groups and race inequalities (see Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). I have eventually settled into Bourdieu not because he uses race in any explicit way but because as I argue in **Chapter 9 – Using Bourdieu to Theorise Academic Success**³ his desire to make explicit

³ I also appreciate that I am somewhat flouting traditional laws of thesis writing by positioning the discussion of theory towards the end of the chapters. I do this because I want the reader to remain focussed on the starkness of the data as it is revealed and also to allow him or her to share in the

the implicit and his attempt to argue for a balance between individual choice and structural constraint sit well with my personal stance on equity and social justice and my interpretation of the findings of this research.

Bourdieu is concerned with complexities and those processes which though given status (*legitimacy*) quite arbitrarily by dominant groups within society form the implicit tools of assessment or the rules of each social space (*field*). Inequality exists because these rules are never made explicit, they remain *misrecognised*:

“In short, the property emphasized by the name used to designate a category, (...), is liable to mask the effect of all the secondary properties which, although constitutive of the property, are not expressly indicated.” Bourdieu (1986: 103)

In terms of the field that is Metropolitan High, certain pupils' characteristics, family backgrounds, home environments and forms of dress are perceived, I argue, as *illegitimate* to the acquisition of academic success. I also draw on Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital to maintain that many Black pupils are seen by staff as possessing the wrong type of capital or currency, through their family structure, dress, demeanour or interest in rap music, to be able to survive and successfully negotiate schooling. I further make the argument, using as evidence the fear expressed by female staff about their physicality and heightened presence, that Black boys in themselves on account of their gender and ethnicity are seen to possess a low status *embodied capital* further reducing their (perceived) legitimacy within the school context. Taken together, the extent to which they are positioned as illegitimate along with their low embodied capital, automatically situates Black pupils, Black boys in particular as unlikely to succeed academically. While academic failure was not the original focus of this thesis as I explained earlier I was led by the data and, as I discuss in the **Chapter 10** this unexpected change in focus is itself of considerable importance in reflecting the challenge faced by staff in simply not being able to associate the concept of academic success with Black pupils.

development of my thought-processes and analysis and the way in which the data led me to arrive at Bourdieu as my theoretical tool.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review: Black pupils and educational attainment

Introduction

This literature review provides a critical overview of research regarding academically successful Black students. I first explore the ever-changing but important use of terminology in relation to the 'race' field. I next outline the key economic and wider social context relevant to the Black population in Britain in order to provide some understanding of the wider context in which the debates on education and Black pupils are situated.

The subsequent account narrows to offer an historical and political overview of Black pupils in the British education system. Attention then turns to what I term current issues, based on the introduction of new forms of legislation under New Labour, regarding the performance of Black pupils. The often controversial reasons and solutions surrounding the educational performance of these pupils are debated. Finally, the review concludes with a presentation of research that has sought to understand how pupils themselves adapt, react and cope with schooling in response to the dominant discourse of the school.

Terminology

I am going to outline key perspectives regarding some of the terms I use throughout this thesis which include: ethnicity (and therefore ethnic group); race; the use of the term Black; and, the use of the term British.

Ethnicity

The Dictionary of Race and Ethnic Relations describes ethnicity as "the salient feature of a group that regards itself as in some sense ... distinct". Thus, in this context an ethnic group can be defined as one, which possesses:

"...some degree of coherence and solidarity (and is) composed of people who are, at least latently, aware of having common origins and interests." Cashmore (1994:102)

Therefore, everyone has an ethnicity, despite the fact that the term and the related notion of "ethnic group" are frequently and incorrectly only associated with Black and minority ethnic populations, and seldom to dominant white groups.

Monitoring ethnicity was initially used as a way of limiting the numbers of immigrants entering Britain, although it can also be used to regulate and address inequalities that arise throughout all areas of social and economic life (Bonnett & Carrington, 2000). Despite the possible benefits, a question pertaining to ethnic group classification was only introduced in the Census for the first time in 1991 (Office for National - ONS, 1991) although this stimulated a number of ongoing concerns and questions as to the nature of the ethnic categories *per se*. For example, it did not acknowledge what Modood (1993) calls hyphenated identities, where individuals may identify with more than one country of origin. Hallan (1994) also contests the terms 'Black Caribbean' and 'Black African', also used in the most recent census (ONS, 2001), arguing that they incorrectly suggest that there are no white people from those places.

Significantly, the 1991 Census only offered one category for "white" groups compared to the breakdown afforded to other ethnic groups, which not only relates to skin colour but also reflects the very implicit normalising and unproblematic positioning of whiteness compared to the heightened attention and interrogation paid to those of other ethnicities (Modood, 1993; Hallan, 1994; also Apple, 1999). The later 2001 Census attempts to offer some token of complexity in relation to this ethnic group by the addition of 'British', 'Irish' and 'Any other White background' under the heading "white" (ONS, 2001a) and by introducing, for the first time a new Mixed category for those identifying as mixed heritage. However, this latter classification has also come under fire for restricting the focus on those who are mixed in relation to white heritage (that is, White and Black Caribbean, White and Asian, for example) with little acknowledgement of people of other mixed heritages.

Despite the classifications proffered by the ONS, comparing and contrasting by ethnicity in research, in relation to educational performance, for example, is rarely straightforward. Ethnic categories are not used consistently either across studies (Demaine, 1989) or within them (see for example Pathak, 2000 and the Department for Education and Skills – DfES, 2001a). In addition, 'Black African' and 'Black Caribbean' are frequently collapsed under the single term 'Black' (The Runnymede Trust, 2000) *despite* recorded differences in economic background, attainment, social class and experiences of school (Gillborn & Gipps, 1996). A similar pattern has been in evidence with those in Mixed White and Black African/Caribbean categories who have also tended to be subsumed under the heading Black. Where an explanation for this is given, it is usually to allow for sufficiently large sample sizes to facilitate statistical comparison (Department for Education and Skills – DfES, 2001a). It is only recently that those of mixed heritage have begun to occupy a distinct space through educational research that focuses specifically on their experiences and needs (e.g. Tikly, Caballero, Haynes & Hill, 2004).

Race

The original use of the term race supported the view that people could be categorised into biologically distinct groups identified primarily by skin colour. While this view served as a fundamental justification for the slave trade, in which African people were situated and treated as inferior, the notion of separate races has now been rejected by scientific research and most reputable practitioners (Bhavnani, Mirza & Meetoo, 2005; Earle & Lowe, 2005). Importantly, many of the racialised beliefs about differences between groups, still exist today often evidenced in the ways in which differences by ethnicity across key policy sectors are interpreted and, as I show in the current research, in the stereotypical perceptions about why Black pupils do not achieve.

On being Black

Terminology relating to various ethnic groups, especially those from minority ethnic communities has changed in accordance with particular socio-political and historical climates. Following significant migration¹ to Britain in the late forties and fifties (see below), the people of the Caribbean were generally referred to as West Indians. The current emphasis has changed with permutations of Black British, Black Caribbean and Afro-Caribbean being in common parlance (Modood & Berthoud, 1997).

Although the term 'Black' has moved from occupying a wholly negative and racist discourse², through the determination of the Civil Rights Movement, Hall (1992) maintains that it still reeks of suppressive marginality. On one hand being "Black" allows "postcolonial migrants of different languages, religions, cultures and classes" an identity that sees as shared the experiences of white racism³ (Hall, 1992; Mirza, 1997a; Modood, 1997). On the other hand, to be Black can also mean *not being* white. In other words "white" exists as a fixed, stable norm and any other ethnic groups are umbrellaed under the heading "black", in relation to whiteness, *irrespective* of their cultural and economic differences (Apple, 1999). Modood (1993) brands this simplistic dichotomy "racial dualism" insisting that it encourages the "othering" of Black people, where 'whiteness' becomes the ruler against which everyone else is measured (hooks, 1991; Howitt & Owusu-Bempah, 1994) evident in current discourse through references to "non-white" groups.

¹ That is not to say that the UK was not ethnically diverse before this period. The history of the UK is one of diversity and migration reflected, for example, by the presence of the French Huguenots in the 16th century, by Queen Elizabeth I's reference to the deportation of all "negroes and blackamoors" (see Runnymede, 2003: 160 for overview of historical background on race and education). The period that I refer to is when *significant* numbers of those from former Commonwealth countries were invited to and arrived in the UK.

² Mainly as a consequence of the slave trade, the word "black" became associated with inferiority. If you were a "light-skinned" slave you were afforded a higher status, such as household duties, better living conditions, food, clothing and even educational opportunities than the "darker" skinned slaves who were more likely to be assigned work in the fields (see Hope Franklin & Moss, 1993; Wade, 1996).

In light of such demonstrations, there are those who argue for a more sophisticated understanding of ethnicity which recognises both the fluidity and complexity within ethnic groups and, the role of the changing environment and personal circumstance in defining ethnicity (Bhavnani et al. 2005). This understanding acknowledges that there is no singular concept of "Black" since those thus termed, in fact represent a diverse range of cultural and historical experiences (Hall, 1992).

On being British

People of the Commonwealth countries were granted British status under the British Nationality Act of 1948 (Grosvenor, 1997) but the term "British" poses questions of identity that remain far from simple. Modood (1993) stipulates that "British" is too closely linked to notions of "whiteness" and therefore immediately excludes those who are not visibly categorised thus. Developing this idea, Gill (1998) maintains that to be both Black and British is to occupy a space of contradiction (also see Mirza, 1997a) and by way of example, he cites Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, who during the Falklands War proudly spoke of Britain as a nation that had "built an empire and ruled a quarter of the world" (p. 17). Quite clearly, British African Caribbeans or British Indians, for example, cannot pretend to have had an equal stake or position in this particular construction of history.

These debates on Britishness and British identity have, of recent, received heightened coverage in the light of the terrorist attacks in American during September 1999, the London bomb attacks during July 2005 and the opening of borders across the European Union all of which have had minority ethnic populations as their focus (see for example Gordon Brown's speech to the Fabian Society (Brown, 2006); Bhavnani et al., 2005:43). The very fact that these debates have been reactionary, as though there is a need to protect some fixed notion of Britishness, continues to contribute to the positioning minority ethnic groups as problematic and Other.

This research is fuelled by concerns about the educational achievement of Black Caribbean pupils but, as is evident in the chapters discussing the research findings, has in many ways been led by participants' own language use and the tendency to make reference simply to Black pupils generally, with only some specific reference to those of Caribbean heritage. In this literature review, I tend to use the terms African Caribbean, Black Caribbean or Black to refer to pupils or people of Caribbean heritage. I acknowledge that the latter term can include those of African and mixed heritage. When citing from the literature, I have used the terms appropriated by the particular author(s) to reflect the socio-historical context in which the article was written.

³ However, not everyone who was identified in this way was in agreement with this label. Modood (1997) reports that many South Asians (i.e. those of Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi heritage) do not relate to the term.

Black children in British schools – a historical perspective

Documentary evidence confirms the presence of Black people (i.e. from Africa) in Britain as long ago as the 16th century (File & Power, 1981), and there are also indications that they may have settled in small numbers prior to this period (Adi, 1995). However, it is only following World War II that large numbers of Black people came to settle in Britain. The Office for National Statistics reports a sixteen-fold increase⁴ in the numbers of Caribbean immigrants between the years of 1951 and 1966 (Haskey, 1997). These newcomers were tempted by the hope of securing jobs that the British government advertised in heavily publicised campaigns throughout the Caribbean (Gibson & Barrow, 1986; Gaine & George, 1999).

The following account details the historical position of Black pupils in Britain. Though divided into time phases, these periods do not reflect clearly demarcated eras, rather they serve as what Gillborn (1999) refers to as a “heuristic device” in that they allow an understanding of the dominant perspectives evident in wider government policy (Troyna & Carrington, 1990).

Assimilation

In a period stemming from the late 1950s to the early sixties, views on the education of what were then termed immigrant children can be considered a reflection of wider governmental policy regarding the settlement of Black and minority ethnic groups in Britain as a whole (Tomlinson, 1983). Patterson (1969) argues that the concerns about apparent concentrations of immigrant children in schools, was based on there being insufficient teachers and school-buildings and, over-crowded classrooms. Although this was indeed a reality, others maintain that the overriding preoccupation of the government was, in fact, an anxiety that these *outsiders* would threaten the dominant British “way of life” (Tomlinson, 1983; Troyna 1992; Runnymede, 2003).

The political solution, therefore, was twofold: to curb the growing numbers of entrees to Britain through the passing of the Commonwealth Immigrants Act (1962) (Patterson, 1969) and, to encourage those already residing in Britain to merge and disperse unassumingly into existing mainstream society (Tomlinson, 1983; Gillborn, 1999). In terms of education, this process of assimilation was characterised by two prominent courses of action. The first of these was a keen emphasis on the teaching of English to children, for whom it was an additional language (mainly though not exclusively to those of South Asian parentage).

⁴ The 1951 Census indicates that there were 17,000 people resident in Britain who had been born in the Caribbean Commonwealth as compared to 270,000 in 1966.

As Troyna (1992) explains, this frequently required the removal of these pupils from mainstream schools to language centres located off-site. The second involved the dispersal of immigrant pupils across a number of schools to reduce the likelihood of high numbers in any one school or area. The aim was to ensure that numbers of ethnic minorities in a single school never exceeded 30% (Bonnett & Carrington, 2000). In this way the cultural balance within schools could be maintained and the academic performance of white pupils would not be hindered. However, LEAs with a number of Black and minority ethnic children rejected this bussing procedure so that, attempts to work the strategy into a formal policy were unsuccessful (Tomlinson, 1983).

Integration

The mid-1960s to the late 1970s saw a period referred to as integration. This was largely as a result of the then Home Secretary, Roy Jenkin's move to place equal opportunities and tolerance at the top of the political agenda (Troyna, 1992; Gillborn, 1999). The tacit objective was to encourage Black and minority ethnic groups to adapt to the "host" culture and to increase majority ethnic knowledge of the various histories and traditions of the newcomers. It was thought that this awareness would allow for the smooth integration of minority pupils into the "British way of life" (see Swann, 1985: 196).

African Caribbean parents, however, had other concerns, namely the increasing numbers of their children in schools for the "Educationally Subnormal" (Coard, 1971). This worry was perpetuated by evidence that suggested that once placed in such schools, not only were these children unlikely to ever be returned to mainstream schooling, but their future employment prospects would also be adversely affected (Coard, 1971; Tomlinson, 1983).

Another major issue was that of the poorer performance of "West Indian" children compared to white groups (Taylor, 1981; Gibson & Barrow, 1986). The most common reason cited for the performance discrepancy was the reported low self-esteem of these new pupils (see also Chapter 7). Some schools sought to remedy this perceived characteristic deficit by adapting the curriculum to meet the needs of these pupils. Generally, the overriding focus remained on "customising" the pupils from minority ethnic groups to a perceived British norm, for example, by the increased teaching of English to those for whom it was an additional language.

Multiculturalism/antiracist perspectives

Multicultural education (MCE) was based on the premise that black and minority ethnic pupils suffered from low self-esteem as a result of living in a hostile and discriminatory environment. In turn, this was thought to impact negatively on their ability to perform well academically.

Supported by the work of Milner (1975), a culture-sensitive curriculum was deemed the best way of not only challenging these negative self-images but also of reducing feelings of prejudice (from white pupils) thought to derive from ignorance of other cultures (Nixon, 1985).

The multicultural curriculum, therefore, emphasized the teaching of the main characteristics and customs of different ethnic groups, with the intention of fostering respect, preventing and ultimately eliminating racism (Assistant Masters and Mistresses Association – AMMA, 1987):

“...a broad multi-cultural curriculum for all pupils, irrespective of their racial, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, is the prime means by which education can contribute to the elimination of racial injustice from society. All, not least the white majority, need to be led to an understanding of the cultural diversity to be found in Britain today, and to view this diversity in a positive light.” AMMA (1987:9)

The concept of multiculturalism was given widespread support through an independent inquiry into the causes of underachievement of West Indian pupils. The Rampton and ensuing Swann report crucially rejected the hereditary theory of intelligence, which attributed poor academic performance to genetic factors and, acknowledged the need to develop good teacher-pupil relationships and to challenge the low expectations that teachers held towards minority pupils (Rampton, 1981; Swann, 1985). Importantly, the Swann report also cited racism (both direct and unintentional⁵⁴) as a significant discriminatory factor in the schooling of minority pupils (Swann, 1985: 319).

However, MCE received criticism for its simplistic analysis and treatment of racism and culture. First of all, the curriculum was seen as stereotyping or “exoticising” minority ethnic groups in a manner that perpetuated difference (for minority groups themselves and white majority pupils) rather than forging cultural understanding (Troyna, 1987; Modood, 1993). Secondly, the concept of racism challenged by multiculturalists remained somewhat blind to the role of power in

⁵ Unintentional or institutional racism is defined by the report as “... the way in which a range of long established systems, practices and procedures, both within education and the wider society, which were originally conceived and devised to meet the needs and aspirations of a relatively homogeneous society, can now be seen not only to fail to take account of the multi-racial nature of Britain today but may also ignore or even actively work against the interests of ethnic minority communities” p28

interpersonal and institutional contexts (Rattansi, 1992; Gillborn, 1995) and to the fact that even those pupils with high self-esteem could encounter racism (German, 1996).

Anti-racist education (ARE) was hailed as the approach that would overcome the shortcomings of multiculturalism by offering an analysis of racism that acknowledged power inequalities throughout society. Evidence of this perspective was illustrated in widespread advertising campaigns by the Greater London Council (GLC), led by Ken Livingstone and the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA), which sought to "kick racism out of town"⁶ by highlighting racial discrimination (Gilroy, 1987; Gillborn, 1990).

However, anti-racism faced its own criticism, most notably from Paul Gilroy (1987) who maintained that this "municipal anti-racism" though well-intentioned, offered simplistic notions of 'race' which, like MCE, reinforced the notion of group differences. Others argued that the shallowness of anti-racist perspectives was illustrated in its commitment to colour and class differences, with no acknowledgement of cultural racism (Modood, 1993; May, 1999). Cultural racism was a developing area of concern which indicated that racism could not clearly be defined in "black and white" terms but needed to be understood in light of historical and economic climates, which affected how people made sense of their immediate environment (Gilroy, 1987; May, 1999; also Bhavnani et al, 2005: Chapter 1).

In addition, the anti-racism initiative was not aided by the much-publicised murder of South Asian student Abdul Iqbal Ullah in a Manchester school (Macdonald, Bhavani, Khan & John, 1989). The main findings of the Macdonald report which led an inquiry into the student's death, advocated policies that recognised the complex and pervasive nature of racism in the daily lives of all. However, this message was ignored as the media took the opportunity to launch a scathing attack on the anti-racism practised by schools (Rattansi, 1992; Gillborn, 1999).

Thatcherism

1979 saw the election of a Conservative government under the leadership of Margaret Thatcher (Cook & Barker, 1981). Educationally, this signalled the rejection of the recommendations of the Swann report and its suggestion that racism was "endemic in much of British education" (Gaine & George, 1999) and the introduction, of the National Curriculum under the Education Reform Act 1988. The primary tenet of the Act was to provide pupils with the practical skills needed to ensure employment in the workplace and the curriculum, which detailed precisely what pupils

⁶ "Let's kick racism out of town" was the advertising slogan used in one of the GLC's posters. For a critical analysis of this and other anti-racist strategies see Gilroy (1987).

were taught, was the tool with which the government could ensure that this aim was met (Gillborn, 1990; Hardy & Vieler-Porter, 1992).

Black and minority ethnic children were condemned in two major ways. First of all, the Tory government refused to acknowledge the role and consequences of cultural difference, maintaining that treating everyone the same, in effect 'colour-blindness', was the best approach (Gillborn, 1999). Secondly, the curriculum brought with it bureaucratic demands, in terms of paperwork and limited time. One consequence of this was that teachers increasingly used disciplinary procedures such as fixed term and permanent exclusions⁷ to remove difficult children from the classroom to better enable them, as teachers, to meet the targets and requirements imposed by the new curriculum (Bourne, Bridges & Searle, 1994; Searle, 1996). A disproportionate number of these excluded pupils were Black (Blyth & Milner, 1994).

The following period of change within educational policy was seen under New Labour who were elected in 1997. They survived their first term of office under Tony Blair and were re-elected in the 2001 and 2005 elections. For this reason this period will be referred to as the present day perspective and it is the repercussions of policies under this government that receive attention in the next section of this review.

Present problems and solutions

Before examining the present educational situation of African Caribbean young people it is important to gain an understanding of the way this ethnic group is situated in the current social and economic climate:

- ◆ African Caribbean people account for approximately 12% (about 565,800) of the 4.6 million people who are classified as belonging to Black and minority ethnic communities in the UK. Groups categorised as Black or Black British make up approximately 25% of the UK's Black and minority ethnic population (Office for National Statistics, 2001b).
- ◆ Sixty one percent of the Black Caribbean population of England and Wales and 78% of the Black African population live in London (ONS, 2004). Just over 12% (12.4%) of the London population is Black and are most likely to live in Inner London (Virdee & Williams, 2003).

⁷ A pupil who has received a fixed term or temporary exclusion, may not attend school for a specific number of days, as determined by the headteacher. Under current legislation this must be no more than 45 days in the school year and only after other forms of discipline have been attempted. Permanent

- ◆ Though Black students (especially African Caribbean women) are more likely to stay on into further and higher education than their white counterparts, they are less likely to be in employment six months after graduating (Kysel & West, 1992; Ethnic Minority Employment Task Force, 2004). They also earn less than their white colleagues, and are disproportionately employed in non-graduate positions (Coffield & Vignoles, 1997; Kellner, 1998)
- ◆ Black African and Black Caribbean groups suffer particularly high levels of unemployment with Caribbean men more likely to be unemployed in comparison to their female counterparts (Twomey, 2001; Home Office, 2005) and of all ethnic groups, Caribbean women are more likely than men to occupy the top two social classes (Sly, Thair & Risdon, 1998).
- ◆ Black Caribbeans are the second most likely group (preceded by Bangladeshis) to live in inner cities and social housing compared with other ethnic groups. This is a consequence of low income and high levels of poverty (Lakey, 1997).
- ◆ Black Caribbeans are more likely to report bad or very bad self-assessed health in comparison to the general population (White, 2002)

It is clear that this group experiences disadvantage in a wide range of areas. According to the current Prime Minister, Tony Blair, the best defence against this type of "social exclusion"⁸ is having a job, and the best way to get a job is to have a good education" (Social Exclusion Unit - SEU, 1999). More recently, the government, through the Home Office, has made a commitment to an overall improvement in the key areas of social policy (health, education, employment, housing, for example) with a view to "identifying and meeting the specific needs of different communities" and "strengthening society" (Home Office, 2005: 5).

exclusion refers to the long-term removal of the pupil from school. In such cases, the Local Education Authority should provide alternative arrangements for the continued education of the pupil (DfEE, 1999a).

⁸ By the Social Exclusion Unit's definition, social exclusion is "a short-hand term for what can happen when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems, such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown." www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/seu accessed 3/07/01

School performance

The role of education

A major premise within current government is that if children are given the same opportunities for learning they will have equal chances to succeed in all aspects of life as regards to obtaining, for example, employment and satisfactory housing (Blunkett, 1997, 1999; Clarke, 1999; DfES, 2005c):

"To overcome economic and social disadvantage and to make equality of opportunity a reality, we must strive to eliminate, and never excuse, underachievement in the most deprived parts of our country. Educational attainment encourages aspiration and self-belief in the next generation, and it is through family learning, as well as scholarship through formal schooling, that success will come." Blunkett (1997: 3)

"To overcome economic and social disadvantage and make equality of opportunity a reality, we need to give every child a good command of English and maths. Without a firm grasp of the basics, children will struggle to succeed. (...) This year, children at 11, 14 and 16 achieved the best ever results in English and maths – but we remain ambitious to move forward and achieve excellence and equity." DfES, (2005c: 50)

This is a doctrine which assumes that if the process of learning is the same, all ethnic groups will achieve equally and there will be no significant differences in attainment between the groups (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000). However, this approach, just like the policies under Thatcher's legislation, could be accused of being colour-blind. In other words, it is a perspective, which is insensitive to the fact that many pupils from Black and minority ethnic groups are discriminated against in a way that renders the equality of opportunity rhetoric meaningless.

This argument is best exemplified by the recent government initiative to reduce permanent exclusions by one third by 2002 (SEU, 1999). This saw a blanket reduction in the figures so that anomalies evident four years ago were merely replicated. In other words, Black Caribbean pupils are *still* being disproportionately excluded from school, despite the government's proclamations that the targets have been met (DfES, 2001b). This has been met with accusations of racism since arguably in order to address the disproportionate exclusions of Black Caribbean pupils, provision has to be implemented that specifically focuses on this ethnic group (TES, 1998, Ouseley, 1998; Gillborn & Youdell, 2000). In order to address these continuing inequalities, educational researchers advise a more just measure of determining fair life chances based on the concept of equity.

Proponents supporting the notion of equity acknowledge that some groups are disadvantaged due to their ethnicity and argue that in order to ensure the equal or fair distribution of an outcome, such as educational qualifications, additional resources should be allocated to those in

most need even if this results in those resources being unequally distributed (Valli, Cooper & Frankes, 1997). However, opponents of this approach contest the 'singling-out' of any group for (perceived) special treatment maintaining that rather than promoting a social, political and economic climate of fairness, equity would foster a climate of fragmentation and bias (Schlesinger, 1992; Alderman, 2001). Such critics oppose the formal recognition of ethnic group *difference*, yet alone inequality. The following extract, written by a former pro vice-chancellor of the University of Middlesex, London, illustrates this perspective nicely:

"A university may be in a town in which a third of the population have green faces. That is no reason for concluding that a third of the student body, or the teaching faculty, or the campus janitors, should display a similar characteristic. Affirmative actionists may try to argue that, historically, the green-faced have had a raw deal. This may be true. But there is no quick-fix academic solution to this problem. If we reserve a certain number of places for the green-faced, we can only do so by inflicting a deliberate injustice on applicants from other races. That is the American approach. It cannot be justified in the UK." (Alderman, 2001)

Alderman's approach reflects a lack of critical analysis regarding the original inequalities inferred on the green-faced "ethnic group" and a protection preoccupation with maintaining the perceived rights of other groups. No solution is offered for the ways in which those prevailing inequalities about access might be addressed.

Criteria for success

The 1997 White Paper "Excellence in Schools", published shortly after New Labour were elected to office, reflected the government's commitment to setting targets and raising standards. It promised that each school would have targets for attainment based on its most recent Ofsted inspection; comparable information from similar schools at local and national level, and, on information on the rate of progress needed to achieve national targets (DfEE, 1997:26). A similar commitment is reflected in the recent 2005 White Paper, with the emphasis on personalised learning and increased academic attainment evidenced through, for example, an emphasis on increased parental choice of school, setting by ability, the development of the gifted and talented programme and, a focus on "stretching the aspirations and achievement" of those from Black and minority ethnic groups (DfES, 2005c).

Success in compulsory education is usually understood to refer to the percentage of pupils achieving five or more A* to C grades at GCSE and equivalent (GNVQ). GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education) and GNVQ (General National Vocational Qualification) refers to the examinations that pupils sit during Year 11, around the age of 16 in this their final year of compulsory schooling (Department for Education and Employment - DfEE, 1996). The best performing schools are 'measured' by the percentage of pupils obtaining A*-C grades

(SEU, 1999). The results are published in annual performance tables, as “an invaluable source of information for parents on the achievements of pupils in their local secondary school and how they compare with other schools in the area and in England as a whole” (DfEE, 2000a) and resorted into achievement order and published as league tables in the national press. The focus of these tables is on the percentage of pupils per school who achieve the highest percentage of pupils achieving these key grades. Since 1998, performance tables have also included the percentage of pupils achieving one or more GCSE A*-G so as to “reflect the GCSE/GNVQ achievements of pupils across a wide ability range”. Nonetheless, there is evidence to suggest that qualifications at this level, are deemed of negligible value both by employers and pupils themselves (SEU, 1999; Gillborn & Youdell, 2000). The government also during the course of the fieldwork for this research and in response to widespread criticism about performance tables from teaching unions, introduced the notion of value-added scores, with the aim of better reflecting the improvement made by pupils at each key stage irrespective of whether this corresponds to actual A* to C grades⁹ (BBC, 2003). This might, however, be regarded as a tokenistic gesture, since the acquisition of A* to C grades remains the predominant criteria for assessing academic success.

Black Caribbean pupils attaining A*-Cs

Summarising the academic performance of African Caribbean pupils is difficult because a number of Local Education Authorities (LEAs) do not differentiate between African, African Caribbean and “other Black” pupils (see ‘Ethnicity’, p.19). Subsequently, it is not always clear whether statistics are based on data from one, two or all of these ethnic groups (Gillborn & Mirza, 2000).

Between 1989 and 1996, data indicates that the gap in black-white attainment was increasing (Gillborn & Gipps, 1996; Ofsted, 1999; Gillborn & Mirza, 2000). In 1989, 30% of white pupils obtained five or more A* to C grades compared with 18% of Black pupils. In 1996 these figures were 40% and 23% respectively (Youth Cohort Study - DfEE, 2001c).

More recent data on school performance is provided by the Youth Cohort Study¹⁰ (YCS) (DfEE, 2001c). These statistics indicate that the gap in black-white attainment is decreasing, with 29% of Black pupils attaining 5 or more A*-C GCSE grades in 1998, compared with 47% for their white counterparts. These figures rose to 37% and 50% respectively for the year 2000 (Kelly, 2001) (see fig. 2.1).

⁹ See www.dfes.gov.uk/performance/tables/schools_04/sec3b.shtml (accessed 17/03/06) for details

¹⁰ The YCS sample is randomly selected every 2 years from all Year 11 pupils in England and Wales. The response rate for participation in the study is approximately 70%, though it does not obtain representative

Year:	1989	1996	1998*	2000*
White	30	40	47	50
Black	18	23	29	37
Difference	12	17	18	13

*includes GNVQ results

Fig. 2.1: Percentage of pupils obtaining five or more A*-C GCSEs by ethnicity.

However, this data should be interpreted with some caution. Since 1998, statistics on attainment have also included equivalent GNVQ qualifications with the aim of reflecting the achievements of pupils across a wider ability range (SEU, 1999). Evidence suggests that Black pupils are disproportionately entered for these lower level (and status) examinations (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000)¹¹. This is also reflected by data which indicates that the highest qualification in Year 11 for 1998, based on GCSE results alone, shows that African Caribbean, along with Pakistani and Bangladeshi pupils were *least likely* to obtain the best GCSEs (read five or more A*-C) (SEU, 1999). Recent figures are no more optimistic, with 44.7% of all Black pupils achieving five or more A* to C grades in 2005 compared with a national average of 54.9% of pupils (see Fig. 2.2) (DfES, 2005a). Interestingly, the degree of optimism or pessimism read into these figures depends very much on the way in which they are interpreted. For example, at a recent national conference on cultural and social class diversity, attention was drawn to the positive increment in Black Caribbean performance as rising 6% since 2004 (East, 2006). In my view, this is a false positive since overall average achievement increased 3% since 2004 and, since these pupils still achieved below the national average. This shows that the way in which data is interpreted has important consequences for how the equality agenda is implemented.

numbers of ethnic minorities, low achievers or those who are not in employment, education or training. The data is weighted to allow for these inconsistencies.

¹¹ There are a plethora of stories across the mainstream and educational press which reveal some of the tactics schools employ to increase the numbers of pupils in this important A* to C grade category (see for example Davies, 2000; Manning, 2006).

TABLE REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES



Fig. 2.2: Percentage of Black pupils achieving five or more A* to C grades at GCSE and equivalent in England, 2004, 2005. *Source:* DfES (2004a); DfES (2005a)

Gender, social class and ethnicity

While these findings are important they by no means tell the whole story. There are important differences when attainment data is also analysed in relation to social class and gender.

DIAGRAM REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES



Fig. 2.3 Attainment inequalities by race, class and gender, England & Wales 1988-1997
(five or more higher grade GCSEs relative to the national average) *source:* Gillborn & Mirza (2000)

Much of the focus on attainment has centred on differences in performance for boys and girls, with a concern that boys are 'falling behind' (Wintour & Bright, 2000; Woodward, 2000; Clare, 2000). Drew & Gray (1991) examined British studies since 1981 and, controlling for ethnicity, gender and social class, analysed differences in examination results. They found that socioeconomic status accounted for most of the variance in school performance (also see Gillborn, 1997). This corroborates the work of Gillborn & Mirza (2000), who demonstrate with data from the Youth Cohort study that the largest differences in attainment occur in relation to social class, 'race' and then gender (fig. 2.3).

With regards to Black Caribbean girls, qualitative and quantitative research indicates that girls are performing better than boys (Mac an Ghaill, 1988; Mirza, 1992; Gillborn & Gipps, 1996) though the indications are that they are still not attaining equally in relation to their white counterparts (Gillborn & Mirza, 2000; DfES, 2005a).

Exclusions

Exclusions¹² have been another major area of political and local concern. According to the Department for Education and Employment (now the Department for Education and Skills - DfES) exclusions should only occur:

"...in response to serious breaches of a school's discipline policy; and once a range of alternative strategies have been tried and have failed; and if allowing the pupil to remain in school would seriously harm the education or welfare of the pupil or of others in the school" (DfEE, 1999a)

At the end of the 1996/1997 academic year, when New Labour began office, there were 12,668 permanent exclusions from schools¹³ (DfES, 2001a). The over-representation of Black pupils, (boys and girls of African Caribbean origin) in these figures has constantly grabbed the headlines (Malik, 1997; Olser, 1997; Times Educational Supplement, 1998). Over the last four years Black pupils have been 4 to 6 times more likely to be excluded from school nationally, than their white counterparts, while this figure has been as high as fifteen in some LEAs (Ouseley, 1998) with the figures for the 2003 to 2004 academic year still remaining at three times the national average (DfES, 2005b).

Consequences of exclusion

In 1993 the Department for Education, reported that less than one in three permanently excluded pupils ever returned to mainstream schooling, decreasing to about one in six for the

¹² For definition see footnote 7.

¹³ Includes primary, secondary and special schools.

year 2000 (DfE, 1993; Pomeroy, 2000). School exclusion has serious economic and social implications. Statistics from the YCS (1996/1997) reveal that those pupils who had been permanently excluded from school aged 15/16 were two and a half times more likely to be out of education, employment or training compared to those who had not been excluded (see SEU, 1999). This can lead to a cycle of exclusion resulting in unemployment, poor housing and poverty in later life.

As well as putting increasing emotional and financial pressure on families because children are home all day, studies have also indicated that exclusion may also be related to involvement in anti-social offences and petty crime (John, 1996; Searle, 1996; Pomeroy, 2000). Additionally, Parsons (1996) revealed that exclusions cost the education system, social services, police and courts, approximately £2000 per pupil who is out of school for at least 45 days. He argues instead for more constructive *in-school* provision and support.

Government's Response

In 1999, then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State and Minister of Education, Charles Clarke, acknowledged the "significant variation in rates of ... exclusion", and, as a result, the government set a national target to reduce exclusions by one third by 2002 (DfEE, 1999a). Recent figures for 1999/00 indicate a 20% reduction in permanent exclusions¹⁴ compared with the previous academic year (DfES, 2001a). As I have already shown earlier, even though the DfES indicates that the government has met and is no longer enforcing this target, 'Black Caribbean' pupils are *still* being excluded up to three times the rate compared with the total school population (DfES, 2005b) with the government taking a stringent "zero tolerance" approach to future discipline strategies (DfES, 2005c: 87).

Suggested causes and recommendations

The debate about why Black (notably Black Caribbean) pupils, especially boys, do not do well at school has been entrenched with perpetual controversy and (as a result) has frequently captured the attention of mainstream media. Some practitioners have argued that, while taking account of the role of social class, the main cause is racism. Others tend to focus on the pupils and their families themselves. In this section, I explore the social construct of racism before exploring these differing culturalist and structuralist perspectives.

¹⁴ There were 10,438 exclusions in 1998/99 compared with 8,323 for the following academic year

Racism

A growing body of educational research attributes the low attainment and high rates of exclusion of African Caribbean pupils to racism. This is a serious charge to direct at schools and teachers and, therefore prior to examining some of the evidence, I will briefly outline the forms and definitions of racism.

The Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) has published a code of practice, based on the Race Relations Act (RRA) 1976, towards the elimination of racial discrimination in education. The Act makes it unlawful to discriminate against a person, directly or indirectly, in the field of education (see Chapter 74, Part III, 17 – Race Relations Act 1976). The CRE describes direct discrimination as:

“...treating a person, on racial grounds, less favourably than others are or would be treated in the same or similar circumstances.”

It goes on:

“Racial grounds are grounds of race, colour, nationality including citizenship or ethnic or national origins. Groups defined by reference to these grounds are referred to as racial groups.” CRE (1989:3)

Indirect racism is rather more difficult to define succinctly, since it may include more subtle forms of discrimination:

“It consists of applying...a requirement or condition which, although applied equally to all racial groups, is such that a considerably smaller proportion of a particular racial group can comply with it, and it cannot be shown to be justifiable on other than racial grounds.”
(CRE, 1989:4)

This would include, for example, a school dress code, which prohibits a pupil from wearing a particular form of dress (e.g. a turban) that is a cultural or religious requirement.

Within the last five years, indirect racism, as practised by public bodies, has been at the forefront of political and public debate. This has occurred as a result of the inquiry into the racially motivated murder of Black teenager, Stephen Lawrence. Led by Sir William Macpherson, a major tenet of the inquiry, and one voiced vociferously by the teenager's parents, was that racism played a significant role in the way with which the case was dealt and subsequently pursued (Macpherson, 1999: 6.1). The report stated that public bodies (e.g. the police force; immigration authorities) could be held liable for racist practice. Termed institutional racism, it is defined as:

"The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people." Macpherson (1999: 6.34)

This has marked a major shift in policy, leading to the introduction of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, an extension of the 1976 Act, under which public authorities can now be charged with racist practice (RRAA 2000). This Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) are the body responsible for enforcing the act. They have produced a code of practice, under which schools (and other public institutions) are *legally obliged* to promote race equality. This may take the form of frequently monitoring admissions and exclusions, for example, by ethnicity and subsequently addressing any evident inequalities. The aim of the code and the new duty is to "help schools to tackle discrimination, and promote equality of opportunity and good race relations" (CRE, 2001: 1).

An important, and often overlooked, aspect of racism, as indicated in the definitions described here, is that it can take many forms. It is complex and multi-layered and can change with the social and political climate, as evidenced by the current media and political preoccupation with Muslim groups and those seeking asylum. This preoccupation also demonstrates that racism does not need to simply refer to skin colour but can include prejudice against someone's culture, such as their faith or political status (see Bhavnani et al, 2005).

Exclusions from school and racism

"I didn't want to come here. I tried to find other places, anywhere. I'd heard all about the area, not the school itself, but about the problems of coloured kids, about the reputation of the West Indians. You would read about them mugging old ladies round the place in the papers, but, then the thought of having to teach them."

Secondary school teacher, cited in Mac an Ghaill (1988: 64)

The growth in exclusions has been regarded by some as a direct consequence of the increasing pressure on teachers to manage the heavy workload and bureaucracy of the National Curriculum (Bridges, 1994; Cullingford & Morrison, 1996; Searle, 1996; Barmard, 1997). These demands coupled with teacher racism are widely considered to be a contributing factor in the surge of exclusions by Black pupils. Racism, in this case, is informed by stereotypical perceptions of Black pupils as intellectually incompetent, for example or, "naturally" aggressive (Mac an Ghaill, 1988; Westwood, 1990; Mirza, 1992). These stereotypes are then enacted through discriminatory practice which ultimately results in exclusion. For example, a recent Ofsted inspection, which specifically focused on truancy and exclusion in ten secondary schools, reported that Black pupils were more likely to be disciplined, *even when* engaging in behaviour

similar to that of other ethnic groups (Ofsted, 2001). This finding is also supported by other studies (German, 1996; Kelly, 2000).

"In many of the schools visited both black and white pupils were excluded for violent behaviour, particularly fighting or intimidation. However, the lengths of fixed-period exclusions varied for what were described as the same or similar incidents.....There were also cases....where there appeared to be some reluctance to discipline Black Caribbean boys for minor misdemeanours out of fear of accusations of racism, thus allowing the behaviour to escalate and for it then to be dealt with through the severe sanction of exclusion." Ofsted (2001:23)

Additionally, research carried out in both primary and secondary schools reveals that African Caribbean students are frequently reprimanded because of the way they walk, talk or wear their hair (Wright, 1986; Mac an Ghaill, 1988; Gillborn, 1990). Despite this research, despite guidelines which advise that "...it would be unlawful to suspend pupils from particular racial groups for types of behaviour *for which pupils from other racial groups were not suspended*" [emphasis added] (CRE, 1989:7) and despite their own observations, Ofsted short-sightedly, conclude that, "it does not follow that schools treated pupils differently because of their ethnicity" (Ofsted, 2001: 23). Yet they offer no alternative explanation as to why these exclusion figures occur.

Educational attainment and racism

Data collected by Birmingham Metropolitan Council (1994) posed some important questions about the possible causes for the lower school performance of African Caribbean pupils. The study of 6000 five year-old African Caribbean children revealed that they were performing better than other ethnic groups at least until age 7. However, by age 16 indications were that they were the least successful academically compared to other groups (also Ofsted, 1999). If attainment were based exclusively on internally predetermined factors (e.g. self-esteem, motivation etc.), performance, in theory, should remain consistent across the year groups. That is, the expectation would be that performance at age five would not be significantly different from that at age 16. Since this is not the case, it seems fair to examine the role of other (external) factors in affecting academic performance between baseline assessment (age 5) and GCSE (age 16).

Research does suggest that Black pupils do have fewer opportunities for academic success. For example, attention has focused on how a New Labour climate of standards and targets has resulted in an obsession with those pupils who are most likely to achieve five or more A*-C

GCSE grades. The pressure to reach targets¹⁵ has led to schools employing a range of strategies to avoid bad press, financial ruin or even possible closure:

‘If you are clever, you can improve your GCSE results by picking the right exam board for the right subjects. There are quite different pass rates and you can make quite a difference to your outcomes without making any difference at all to the children’s education.’ ‘Secondary school head quoted in The Guardian – Davies (2000)

However, these processes do not benefit all pupils equally. Gillborn & Youdell (2000) have demonstrated how this “A-to-C economy” results in teachers focusing their time and resources on those pupils guaranteed to achieve A-C or on those who can be ‘pushed up’ from a D to C grade:

“Unless we could swear and put money on the fact that they’re going to get an A or a B we can’t risk them in that top tier. So they’ve got to be very bright, they’ve got to be highly motivated, they’ve got to be permanent attenders, you know, the wind’s got to be blowing in the right direction on every count....” Acting Head of English, Clough Secondary School, Gillborn & Youdell (2000:106)

Pupils who present a “risk” educationally or in terms of (perceived) behaviour or, who may require too much additional support, are not considered beneficial to the school’s “economy” and are placed in lower academic groups (see also Wright, 1986). These pupils receive fewer resources and a poorer quality of teaching. These pupils are disproportionately Black and from working class backgrounds. This is verified by data from the Youth Cohort Study, investigating the activities and experiences of 16 year-olds in England and Wales. The study indicates that Black pupils are more likely to sit intermediate or foundation level vocational examinations than higher level qualifications compared with their white counterparts (DfES, 2001c), qualifications which are deemed of little value by the pupils themselves and those in the employment market (SEU, 1999; Gillborn & Youdell, 2000).

Culturalist and structuralist perspectives

I have established that Black pupils (notably Black Caribbean) are over-represented in exclusion figures and do not share equally in the figures for academic success. I have also demonstrated that both of these problems can be attributed to discriminatory (be they inadvertent) processes within the school system. However, some educational practitioners suggest another explanation, insisting that:

“The issues that drive school achievement are ‘discipline’ and ‘motivation’; the same

¹⁵ Schools which fail to meet their targets are initially subject to a formal warning and the offer of additional support from the LEA. Continued poor performance may result in the withdrawal of funds or, ultimately closure (DfEE, 1997: 28)

things that are often necessary in the creative consumption of music and fashion. Therefore some Black children have placed less value on school work because it is not linked with an anti-school culture that they value more.....It is rebellion for its own sake. It is part of the Black street image." Sewell (2000a)

Implicit within this culturalist perspective is the idea that discipline and motivation *alone* are the factors necessary to school achievement (see Troyna, 1984). It is apparent from the quote, that while Black children are not felt to be completely lacking these key qualities they purposely choose to channel them to fashion and music pastimes, which essentially are anti-school. This approach regards Black children as personally responsible for their current educational predicament and in so doing belittles the impact of external processes on even those with sufficient levels of motivation and discipline and, moreover, overlooks the historical and political context of the "race" and achievement debates.

Similarly, Peter Foster, who has co-written a number of methodological papers with Martyn Hammersley, critiquing research which supports the existence of racist practice within schools, (see Chapter 3; Foster, Gomm & Hammersley, 1996) contends that the problem with African Caribbean pupils lies in the "social structural situation of Afro/Caribbean communities and the poor post-school prospects of (the) students" (Foster, 1990:343). Mac an Ghaill (1988), Wright (1992) and Sewell (1997) have found that some of the teachers in their studies have expressed similar views:

' "The West Indians lads have special problems, specific problems due to their background. A lot, have to deal with, a lot of them that have only one parent... Historically, they had to suffer the effects of slavery, breaking up families and so marriage and family life is missing." ' Ms Yeats, Secondary school teacher (Mac an Ghaill, 1988: 76)

' "...I actually think that generally the African Caribbean boys are louder. I do believe they are more volatile. I don't know if more African Caribbean children come from single homes and so are left to their own devices. Maybe there is a feeling in the home of not being wedded to this society; therefore a feeling that the school system here hasn't got anything to offer them." ' Ms Kenyon, Secondary school teacher (Sewell, 1997:61)

As I demonstrate in through my own research, these types of view are still evident in contemporary schooling (see especially Chapters 5 & 6). Culturalist advocates tend to use the term 'black underachievement' which it has been argued locates the problem *within* the pupil (Sewell, 2000b). Others insist of terms such as 'educational inequality' or 'disadvantage', maintaining that language should be subject to constant critical interrogation due to the powerful way in which it can contribute to perpetuating beliefs and practices (Wright, 1987; Gillborn, 1997). These latter terms focus on processes within the education system rather than pupil or cultural deficit, forming the crux of the structuralist perspective.

Culturalist contender or structuralist supporter? The role of New Labour.

New Labour have funded a number of initiatives to “improve minority ethnic qualifications and skills”, (Bentham, 2000) and to promote racial harmony (DfEE, 1997; Home Office, 2005), since they came to office. Some of the major changes to be witnessed in schools are a drive to recruit more teachers from black and minority ethnic backgrounds (Kingston, 1998, TTA, 2003a, b); the introduction of learning mentors; financial support for supplementary schools; more classes for those who speak English as an additional language and the introduction, under the Aiming High programme, of tailored whole-school support for the achievement of pupils of African Caribbean heritage (DfES, 2003a). These initiatives have been facilitated by an increase in funding from the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (EMAG)¹⁶ (Blunkett, 1999) and the Excellence in Cities initiative (EiC)¹⁷ (DfEE, 2000b; also DfES, 2005c).

In the 2001 white paper on education, Estelle Morris, Secretary of State for Education and Skills, set out the government’s aims for the following four years to 2006 (DfES, 2001b). In terms of attainment, the government intended that at least 25% of pupils in every school obtains 5 GCSEs at A*-C grade. Specific to pupils from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds was a commitment to promoting race equality; monitoring the progress of individual pupils and, encouraging high teacher expectation for all minority ethnic pupils. Once again, the government is also keen to provide additional support to pupils who speak little or no English and to recruit more teachers from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds. The 2005 white paper, as I explained earlier, also expresses a commitment to raising the achievement of these pupils, primarily, through the expansion of the Aiming High programme although the emphasis remains on “bilingual learners”. Criticism has also been levelled at the incessant focus on English language classes (see DfES, 2001b: 3.30). Gillborn (1998) states that statistics on the attainment of Indian students do not support the link between ‘underachievement’ and English proficiency, as theorized by the government.

While there is recognition that the most recent white paper provides explicit mention of Black and minority ethnic pupils, they are nonetheless, relegated to one half page focus (see DfES, 2005c: 57) in the entire one hundred and twenty page document with little consideration of how the increase in practices such as setting by ability and disciplinary procedures will

¹⁶ EMAG replaced the educational element of the Section 11 Home Office grant in 1998. Introduced as a reflection of the government’s commitment to “genuine equality of opportunity for all minority ethnic groups”, its key aims are to provide support to those for whom English is an additional language and, to raise attainment for those “at risk of under-achieving” (DfEE, 1999b, c).

¹⁷ EiC is a government initiative to provide financial support and provision to schools in inner-city areas (DfEE, 2000b).

disadvantage particular Black pupils¹⁸. Further, although the ethnic backgrounds of teaching staff should reflect those of wider society, this must not be viewed as key in targeting “equality of opportunity” and “disadvantage”. Apart from reinforcing fixed and homogenous notions of ethnicity and identity this position suggests that staff from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds are less likely to be prejudiced compared to their white colleagues and locates them as having primary responsibility for addressing the lower achievement of Black and minority ethnic groups (Sewell, 1997; Rollock, 1999).

“...conscious originating motives do not guarantee at all how arguments and policies will be employed, what their multiple and determinate functions and effects will be, whose interests they will ultimately serve, and what identifiable patterns of differential benefits will emerge, given existing and unequal relations of economic, cultural, and social capital and given unequal strategies of converting one form of capital to another in our societies.” Apple (1999:11)

In short, while New Labour has acknowledged differences in educational attainment by ethnicity its attempts at redress are often simplistic and implemented without regard to historical approaches. Further, the stress on school practices that increase the differential treatment of pupils, worded in a discourse about stretching the most able, and coupled with a simplistic understanding of racism (demonstrated through the ineffective application of the 2000 Amendment Act) is only likely to further disadvantage Black pupils.

How pupils cope with school

Increasing attention has been paid to pupils’ experiences and perspectives in attempting to better understand how schools operate and to implement policies from which pupils might benefit (Pomeroy, 2000).

‘Doing school’

Foucault (1984) argues that schools are institutions of power. Power is distributed most evidently from headteacher down through to the pupil, the latter holding the least power (Friere, 1993). It is also exercised covertly, through the transmission of social skills, speech and behaviour that is deemed acceptable and reinforced within the school (Bernstein, 1971; Bourdieu, 1986). This hidden curriculum emphasises not necessarily an academic competence, but a competence in acting in accordance with the dominant discourse of the school (Willis; 1977; Mac an Ghaill, 1988).

¹⁸ The Gifted and Talented programme has received criticism, for example, for benefiting white middle class pupils and not the “disadvantaged” pupils, including Black pupils, at whom it was originally intended (see Kendall, Rutt & Schagen, 2005)

The extent to which the pupil can manipulate the dominant discourse is dependent on the position that individual is seen to occupy in the social hierarchy of the class, their social class, ethnicity and gender (Pomeroy, 2000; also Grenfell & James, 1998). These perspectives form the basis of much of the research on pupils' experiences of school.

Initial research on students' approach to school was initially categorised as either, pro-school and hence *conforming* to the dominant discourse or, anti-school (i.e. they *resist* schooling) (Willis, 1977; Ball, 1981). With regards to Black pupils, Mac an Ghaill (1988) acknowledges that males were often viewed, in his study, in stereotypical ways by teachers. These pupils frequently responded by adhering steadfastly to their cultural norms and engaging in behaviour that reflected their dissatisfaction with school. Gillborn (1990) provides evidence that supports this notion of resistance but also details the experiences of a particular Black male whose form of adaptation, he terms "accommodation". This pupil's behaviour was characterised by a public commitment to academic achievement and attempts to minimise negative incidences with staff (p.60).

Studies, which have focused on Black girls' adaptation to schooling, reveal that they do not necessarily appreciate school but they recognise the value of obtaining qualifications. This pro-education, anti-school stance has been recorded by Fuller (1984) and reworked by Mac an Ghaill (1988) as "resistance within accommodation". In other words, these young women resist the institutional demands of school, such as being on time to lessons, participating in class discussions and particular aspects of the curriculum, which they find racist but perform well academically and value the acquisition of qualifications for their ability to help them secure good positions in the labour market. Straddling these two seemingly unrelated positions causes confusion for some teachers:

' "They (group of South Asian and Black female students) are very strange. I didn't, I mean at first I didn't think that they were as clever as they undoubtedly are. Their written work is very good, at times, excellent, especially Judith. But they have got a strange attitude, I mean not the usual attitude for clever kids. They sit there huddled together in the class, chatting away, never directly interrupting but not fully co-operating either, if you know what I mean. If it was the normal case of being directly cheeky or whatever, you could handle it in the usual way but what do you do with the likes of them. I don't know what makes them tick. Give me a cheeky lad any day." ' Mr Richards, school teacher – Mac an Ghaill (1988:27)

Although Mirza (1992) provides evidence of similar strategies of how young Black women in her study "do school", she rejects the "resistance within accommodation" analysis. She maintains that this perspective essentialises Black women who, in fact are engaged in a fight for inclusivity

and social change, as evidenced in the numbers of Black women in further and higher education and employment (Mirza, 1997b).

Other practitioners insist that the only way to 'do school' successfully, in terms of academic prowess and good relations with teachers is to 'buy into' the school's and, therefore, society's dominant discourse:

"... migrating from the indigenous egalitarian system existing in the African American community to the individualism of the dominant cultural system operating in the school context involves becoming nonhuman. It entails policing one's racialized identity while highlighting one's commitment to the norms, values and beliefs of the larger society. Within the Black community, this obligatory, contested migration is culturally choreographed, marked by its artificiality, tautness, and lack of rhythm and spontaneity."
Fordham (1996:217)

African-American academic, Signthia Fordham insists that being Black *and* successful is to occupy a position of ambivalence. Success, for minority ethnic groups, is defined and shaped by dominant society and therefore in order to achieve, Black pupils must reject their own cultural norms which, it is alleged, places them as failing and inferior, and acquire those of the dominant culture (Fordham, 1996). She contends that this process is forged with contradictions and difficulty, since it means losing the (cultural) acceptance of one's own ethnic group yet surviving on the periphery of dominant society (by virtue of racial discrimination). Fordham has termed this phenomenon "racelessness" (Fordham, 1988; 1996). While I accept the influential normalising role of dominant discourse, I challenge the notion of "racelessness" since it offers a simplistic and reductionist analysis of both Black and white identities and counter following Mirza (1997b) that being Black *and* successful does not mean 'selling out' or becoming "raceless". Mirza asserts that the position of Black women in dominant society is more sophisticated than Fordham's analysis would allow. She maintains that Black women neither *accept* the dominant discourse *nor* reject it, remaining instead "separate from but engaged with existing structures of oppression" whilst still subscribing to their own values and codes of understanding (p276).

Woods (1990) on the other hand, warns against any type of analysis which means simply reducing pupils to distinct categories, maintaining that all pupils are able to adopt a range of positions, which are context- and person-dependent and are not necessarily fixed across time.

Discussion: Black students and academic success

An overview of the educational history of Black pupils in Britain has revealed an overwhelming concentration on their apparent failings and difficulties within the system. Their disadvantage is corroborated, as I have shown, in current figures and research, contributing as Mirza (1997b)

argues to a dominant discourse of failure¹⁹. Those who do not fit into this classification are ignored and marginalised (also see Henry, 1998), reiterating I strongly contend, Modood's (1993) claim that "ethnic minorities are of interest if and only if they can be portrayed as victims of or threat to white society" (p.80).

In contrast, very little research in Britain has examined the adaptations and experiences of academically successful Black male and female students²⁰ (Gillborn & Gipps, 1996; Sewell, 1997) and how teachers understand the notion of academic success. Ofsted has attempted to offer an overview of good practice in relation to Black Caribbean pupils in primary and secondary schools but there is no evidence that these recommendations have been incorporated into national policy nor that they have made any significant impact on Black Caribbean attainment (Ofsted, 2002a, b). There have been glimpses of academic research focusing on the achievement of Black students with some emphasis on the important role of the church and wider community (Channer, 1995) and on interviews with professionals of African Caribbean (or more generally, Black) heritage, asking them to reflect on their school experiences or the roots to their success (Rhamie & Hallam, 2002; MacDonald, 2001). These pieces of work on success are an important contribution to the field since to remain fixed on notions of failure and resistance only serves to reinforce negative stereotypes, encouraging teachers and policy-makers to repeat mistakes of the past (Olser, 1999).

Research has not considered how academically successful Black pupils themselves understand success and how they negotiate school in order to achieve and I seek to do this in the following chapters. An examination of this kind does not mean ignoring or trivialising the inequalities that face this ethnic group. Rather it serves to challenge the culturalist myth of failure and 'underachievement' and, provides the opportunity to forefront the difficulties Black pupils may experience at school and the strategies employed to negotiate them successfully.

¹⁹ Mirza makes this point in relation to Black women although the same can be said, of course, about Black men.

²⁰ Major research that was planned in the early eighties of academically successful black and white students, was abandoned in the fear that it may have detracted attention from the overriding difficulties faced by ethnic minorities in the education system (Swann, 1985).

Chapter 3 – Methodology

I have already provided both a personal and academic rationale for carrying out this research (see Introduction) and provided an overview of the political and historical context for this research on academically successful Black pupils. I have made the argument that the educational achievement field must approach the debate regarding Black pupils from a considered, new angle that takes account of past events and the complexity of racism to avoid simply replicating the issues. In attempting to do this, and to offer a rare positive portrayal of Black pupils, I have chosen to focus on academically successful Black pupils and their experiences of school.

In this section, I tailor attention to the key research questions that have served as the basis for this research. I proceed to give an overview of the methodological approach employed to carry out the research before describing the actual research environment and data collection and analysis process.

Research focus and questions

I am concerned with the processes underlying how some Black pupils, despite the overwhelming current climate of low achievement, manage to achieve. While I do not situate the probable reasons for achievement as solely the result of pupil input, I want to explore pupils' views and perceptions about their work, school environment, for example, and at the same time seek to understand some of the commonly referenced sites of influence in pupils' achievement, namely peer relations and relationships with staff. I also wanted to examine staff conceptualisation of academic success and how it might relate to Black pupils and the type of relationships they are able to build. The following questions, therefore, served as the basis for the research:

- 1 How do staff and academically successful pupils' construct academic success and failure?
- 2 How do academically successful pupils understand their experience of school? How are these experiences shaped by the ethnicity and/or gender of the pupil?
- 3 What are the implications of these findings for Black pupils achieving academically?

I wanted to get behind the statistics and explore the nuanced sensitivities of everyday school life and relationships. I also wanted to examine some of the processes in practice within the school environment and consider how these might shape discourse on academic success. As such I decided to adopt an ethnographic methodology to conduct the fieldwork.

Ethnography

Ethnography involves the researcher becoming immersed in the life or culture under study over an extended period of time to enable the researcher to gain an understanding of the social processes and meanings that individuals attribute to events and interactions (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1993; Walsh, 1998). This information, usually collected through observation and interviews, enables the researcher to provide a "rich description" of the rules and dynamics of the research group (Robson, 1999).

Ethnographers are vigilant of the fact that the construction of events is dependent on a wide range of factors such as the age, religious faith or gender of the narrator. Therefore, narratives are gathered from different perspectives to enhance the richness of the final description. For example, the current research also seeks the views of teachers and those of academically successful pupils from other ethnic groups, which may facilitate a wider understanding of the experiences of their African Caribbean counterparts. Described as triangulation, this process may also include "hard" forms of data, such as school records of examination results or exclusions. The aim is to gain a clearer understanding of the version of events under research, rather than attempt to seek some definitive "truth", since the definition of truth itself is always subject to question.

A major criticism levelled at ethnographic research is that it has tended to be (e.g. see Hammersley, 1999) overly subjective leading in the race equality literature, for example, to the common charge that researchers allow their a priori perspectives to shape their interpretations and subsequent analysis of events. This has, subsequently, triggered some detailed and seemingly incessant debate within the education academic arena, as to when a claim can be considered valid and who decides its validity. Hammersley, a leading proponent in methodological research, contends that the deciding factor must be whether other readers and researchers are able to judge claims made about research findings as "beyond reasonable doubt". In other words, evidence must be judged by two standards: firstly, findings must be deemed plausible, that is they must be considered true in the light of existing knowledge; and secondly, they must also be regarded as credible, in view of the possibility of various types of error occurring within the research process (Hammersley, 1993; 1998a; 1998b).

Additionally, ethnographic research examining 'race' and educational equality has often been accused of victimising teachers (see Foster, 1993). While the sentiment behind this view should not be overlooked, it is equally important to consider that where teachers have been subject to criticism in research that the details behind and reasons for this should be taken seriously since it is unlikely that such attention is without foundation. Further, it is unlikely that any rigorous ethnographic research will make fixed predictive generalisations to the wider school population based on findings from a limited research field. It is more probable that the ethnography will offer suggestions about how the findings might be interpreted in other contexts and pay consideration to existing data that supports the claims.

While it is impossible to reflect the breadth of the methodological argument here, there are a number of opposing viewpoints worth noting. Troyna (1993), for example, disputes the standards imposed by Hammersley, on the grounds that the evidence needed to convince such critics is beyond that considered reasonable by most other educationalists. This notion of "methodological purism" is developed by Gillborn (1998), who argues that social research is not characterised by fixed notions of proof, since there is no fixed reality. Instead, the ethnographer remains cognisant of the fact that the meanings and interpretations that people attribute to events and behaviour are fluid; that is, they are context and time dependent and therefore cannot be defined as *the* truth (Connolly, 1998). Ethnographic research seeks to understand social processes and the relationships between them. "Good" ethnography provides a convincing case for the argument, supported by a wealth of evidence and a reflexive approach.

Reflexivity

Hammersley's (1993) demands for "methodological common sense" in a field as controversial as educational inequality overlooks the very subjectivity embedded in the request since, of course, there is no uniformly agreed definition of what constitutes common-sense. Hammersley and his colleagues appear oblivious to the contradiction of imposing such a measure which itself is subject to personal bias and prejudice. By overlooking the contribution of their own perspectives in shaping the debates (e.g. as white middle class males) they have continued to wage a tireless academic battle¹, with the presumption that they are being fair, unbiased and reasonable (Blair, 1998). Yet, rooted within the ethnographic approach is the need to retain an awareness of self and the ability to critique the role of self as the researcher. This process of reflexivity can shape the quality of the research (LeCompte, 1987). It is important in the collection, analysis, interpretation and publication of the data and can be regarded as a means of addressing issues of power and marginalisation prevalent in society (Mama, 1995).

I very strongly share bell hooks' (1991) view that any researcher involved in analysing matters of culture must reflect on what they bring to the research context and indeed I consider that this should be an obligatory component of academic training and development. hooks insists that:

"Participants in contemporary discussions of culture highlighting difference and otherness who have not interrogated their perspectives, the location from which they write in a culture of domination, can easily make of this potentially radical discipline a new ethnographic terrain, a field of study where old practices are simultaneously critiqued, re-enacted and sustained." hooks (1991:125)

In terms of my own positioning, the research questions discussed above have, to some extent arisen from my personal experiences as a British born African Caribbean woman (as well as a researcher) and, as will become apparent, I reflect on this at various points throughout the research process. In terms of the research field, the way in which I positioned myself in the school, and was positioned by others, was not only shaped by my ethnicity and gender but by a stream of other variables including (perceptions of) age, social class and religion. I had also anticipated that I might be subject to an additional screening from Black participants seeking to determine how I "played"² my Blackness and whose side I was on in relation to my ethnicity and researcher status (also see 'Role of Researcher' below). Mirza (1998) evocatively recounts how she felt her "Asianess" was being "checked out" by the South Asian female pupils she was researching and the way this contributed to the nature of her study. Such evaluation can occur in relation to speech patterns, dress codes, and even choice of social activities, which may be rejected as not fitting into the perceived norm of one's ethnic group. Wright (1998) also discusses the difficult role of being the target of (possibly inadvertent) racist comments from school staff. A good ethnographer will acknowledge and address these issues and consider how they affect the research. Therefore, in addition to collecting data, part of my role involved critically examining my own beliefs and biases and the way in which these impinge on the research process (hooks, 1991). This reflexivity also provides the reader with an insight into the decision-making processes that have informed my research claims and allows him/her to maintain a "critical distance" from which to assess the validity of the work (see Back, 1996: 6). These issues are examined below and later in more detail as I discuss particular areas of the data in the chapters that follow.

¹ For further discussion see Foster, Gomm & Hammersley (1996); Hammersley (1998b); Troyna (1991; 1993); Gillborn (1998); Gillborn & Drew (1993)

² This is difficult to describe but centres on an (often) informal and implicit assessment of identity based, for example, on use of language and accent, hair (whether natural or treated for women), social interests, "realness" – that is the extent to which one situates and conveys oneself as Black and being concerned about issues affecting "the Black community". This policing of identity happens across generations and between men and women and can be incredibly condemning and essentialising (see Weekes, 1997).

Research Environment

Identifying a site to carry out the research was not as straightforward as I had anticipated. I describe this process first before explaining how the interviewed participants were selected for the research.

Identifying a research site

I had decided to focus on the secondary sector with the view that the processes and discourses about academic success would be heightened as pupils sat their final examinations at the end of compulsory education which are conventionally used to determine the extent of a school's success.

A letter and research brief explaining the nature of the research was sent to a number of secondary schools (see Appendix 1) that were accessible with regards to travel and which met the criteria of being co-educational and having a multi-ethnic pupil intake. I originally contacted schools who were average performers in relation to the percentage of pupils achieving at GCSE, however, due to a lack of response and headteachers declining to take part, it was necessary to extend the selection both in terms of travelling distance and performance with the school that eventually agreed to participate achieving below the national average at GCSE. In effect, in an interesting and unanticipated reversal of power, I was obliged to carry out the fieldwork in the one school that agreed to work with me despite the various selection criteria that I had originally imposed as a researcher.

I met with the headteacher during the 2001 summer academic term, some eight months after I had first started to write to schools requesting their involvement. While I provided more detail on how the research would operate in her school, I was made aware of my dependency on her agreement as she clarified the extent to which I would be granted access to staff, pupils and resources. Compared with my previous experience school-based fieldwork, this gatekeeping was particularly stringent and would make itself felt throughout the course of my time in the school. For example, when I (later) drew up a list of staff that I wanted to interview, I had to take it to the headteacher and sat with her at an enormous meeting table while she went through each listed member of staff agreeing or disagreeing about whether I could speak with them. Asked why some staff were being crossed off, to be replaced by others, I was told that some were not suitable because they were part of an old workforce that she had not been able to fully replace since her arrival. This, of course, felt quite frustrating and restrictive since I felt as though I was being subject to a public relations exercise rather than having the opportunity to get as varied a sample of staff as possible. My attempts to negotiate were not entertained but I did find ways of circumventing these restrictions by talking informally with the staff she had

eliminated from the list while in the staff room and, of course, there was nothing I could do if those members of staff spoke to me. This vigilant gatekeeping was evident throughout the course of the fieldwork from a number of incidents and amounted to an underlying atmosphere of heightened carefulness both on my part and, as I witnessed, amongst staff themselves.

Access to the school was established through email and telephone correspondence via a member of staff who had been nominated (by the headteacher) specifically for that purpose although she initially had all my requests to visit confirmed by the headteacher.

Metropolitan High School

The school is located in an inner city local authority well-known for its cultural diversity in a large, rambling building that, in some areas is clearly in need of maintenance. While it provides comprehensive education to both boys and girls up to the age of 18, there are significantly more boys attending the school than girls (a ratio of approximately 2:1). While the school Ofsted inspection report and comments from some members of staff draw attention to the large number of Black (that is Black African, Black Caribbean, Black Other) pupils in the school there are, in fact, roughly equal numbers of pupils from white and Black backgrounds. Twice as many pupils from Black backgrounds tend to be permanently excluded from the school compared white pupils. A high number of pupils within the school receive free school meals and are on the register for having special educational needs.

Participants

Data collection involved both individual interviews with members of staff and pupils identified as academically successful as well as a range of observations.

Interviewed staff were men and women from a range of ethnic backgrounds. There were twenty one staff in total and included head of year groups, support staff, head of subject areas and the senior management team (see Appendix 2). In the interests of confidentiality, pseudonyms instead of their real names are used throughout the research.

My concern with academic success suggested that it would be most apt to focus on periods within the school calendar when academic performance is particularly crucial. For this reason, pupils selected for interview were boys and girls of a range of ethnic backgrounds from Years 9, 10 and 11. At this stage, the first group of pupils choose which subjects they would like to study for Key Stage 4 (KS4) (GCSE or GNVQ), Year 10 pupils are in their first year of KS4 study and the latter group will sit and later receive their results for their KS4 examinations. I spoke with four pupils in Year 9; ten in Year 10 and, eleven in Year 11. I had to be especially flexible

interviewing this latter group because of constraints on their time due to examinations, and the fact that often only came to school for this purpose. I allowed the school to determine its own criteria for selecting academically successful pupils and it made the selection based on pupils who had achieved the highest SATs scores during Key Stage 3 tests (Appendix 2).

Data Collection and Analysis

In this section, I describe in more detail some of the ways in which I positioned myself and was positioned in the research site. I then explain the nature of the observation and interview process that I carried out over the course of the year and close by describing how the data was analysed.

Role of the researcher

My position within the school was that of a participant-observer; that is, I was part of the school environment and attended meetings and achievement days, for example, but did not formally participate in the work of the school. I usually recorded observed situations and overheard conversations as they occurred in my field notebook or, by talking shortly afterwards into my dictaphone while alone in a cubicle in the women's toilets.

In addition to assurances of confidentiality, I explained to both staff and pupils that my role was explicitly to spend time in the school and talk with people and I was not a member of staff. I anticipated that this reconfirmation of my role would avoid my being called to intervene in situations that were out of my remit. I additionally explained to pupils that if they were to share any information where I felt they or someone they knew was in danger that I was obliged to inform a member of staff about the situation.

Aside from my initial correspondence and conversation with the headteacher, I rarely raised the subject of "race" when I was in the school and it was usually discussed after being broached by the interviewee. I took this approach because I did not want the possibility of my subjective views about race and race equality determining the direction and nature of my conversations and I wanted to minimise possible participant fear and discomfort should they feel they were being checked for their race awareness as found by Phoenix (1994), for example, who talks of the fear her respondents displayed and frequently voiced when "race" was the focus of the discussion in her study. Should this be the case, I risked compromising the quality of the data or excluding potential participants. I also had the belief at the start of the fieldwork that where matters around race arose, the positive focus on success would lessen any of the respondents'

immediate reservations. Although I had explained the overall premise of this to the headteacher and asked her to take this same approach with her staff, it is possible that she could have disclosed the full research brief to them.

As discussed earlier, I paid considerable attention to the way in which I was positioned during the course of the research. There were a number of incidents where staff drew on my gender and/or ethnicity in a bid to offer validity and justification to their comments. Some Black members of staff sought implicit collusion with me with regards to my ethnicity. This was most often done by the use of “we”, relating to a perceived Black community or by switching to a non-work, informal language or vocabulary and tone. I tended to engage in this code-switching since it facilitated my establishing rapport with participants (both staff and pupils) and also made me feel comfortable but sought, simultaneously, to retain some form of researcher distance by, for example, not engaging too fully in conversation or limited the amount of switching I did. I also had to exercise a level of vigilance with a couple of the male members of staff who attempted to overstep the professional boundary. All of these situations involved quite a delicate balance of good practice and ethics, rapport-building and boundary-setting.

I also paid some attention to how I felt with different members of staff and pupils. For example, one male staff member while contributing to an interview was nonetheless very dismissive about its particular focus, recommending that I change it in line with his current interests. I had to repeatedly explain that while related, the direction of the research had already been decided although I would be happy for him to commission me to look at his area separately. Despite this he ignored my response and persisted in attempting to encourage me to change the research which made me curious about the nature of his relationships with pupils and the extent to which he might monopolise the direction of conversations and wider classroom interaction. I found another (white) male member of staff abrasive and insensitive with his comments, in particular, regarding his views on gender and the ways in which he drew on my ethnicity and perceived age to provide evidence for his arguments. There is a real challenge between collecting good, hard-impacting data to make a “convincing” argument and standing up for personal and ethical beliefs regarding race equality and social justice.

I also remained wary of the headteacher who, it seemed had a very strong presence throughout the school and who had been such a stringent gatekeeper.

Observation

Initial plans to observe classroom practice were not encouraged by the headteacher as it was felt that this might be intrusive to staff. Although I did receive invitations from some members of staff later during the fieldwork to observe time restrictions meant that this was not possible. I

was able to attend and observe staff meetings and assemblies for upper and lower school. I also attended two achievement ceremonies that took place during the evening after school and which were attended by pupils (who were receiving certificates), their parents, members of senior staff, school governors and a special guest who tended to be a well-known individual within the education and/or 'race' field. I attended an achievement evening in September 2001 and again in September 2002.

I also spent considerable time in the staff room during the school day and was able to build a further sense of the school environment as I constantly moved around in search of quiet and empty spaces to conduct interviews, in search of participants or to meet and interview staff in their classrooms.

Interviews

In total, forty-five participants were interviewed over the course of three academic terms between January 2002 and January 2003. Selected staff were invited to indicate their availability on an interview timetable that had been left in their pigeon holes. Once letters of consent had been obtained from parents, pupils were gathered during a break period and briefed about the interview topic and process and given the opportunity to ask questions. The pupil interviews began first but were soon stopped so the school could confirm that I had been police-checked (I thankfully had received clearance during the course of previous research and was able to produce evidence of this) and so that the school's child protection officer could speak with me.

Both staff and pupils were asked a range of questions that included how they defined academic success and academic failure, how a successful pupil might be identified and, how the achievement of pupils might be improved (see Appendices 3a, 3b for interview schedules).

All interviews were tape-recorded with the participants consent.

It should be noted that staff tended to use the word "pupil" and "student" quite interchangeably and this is also reflected in the main body of the text. While I appreciate that academic research usually employs these terms to reflect different age groups, they should not be read as indicative of this nor of any wider meaning.

Secondary data

In the interests of contextualising and triangulating the data that was being collated, I also collected the school prospectus, general behaviour guidelines, Ofsted reports and general policies and memos. These, of course, cannot be included in this thesis due to reasons of

confidentiality.

Analysis

All interviews were later fully transcribed and key themes and subcategories identified with the help of Nudist NVivo, a software programme for qualitative data. The key themes that emerged under the areas of academic success, academic failure, dress and demeanour, differential treatment and structural barriers to success form the key chapters of this thesis.

Ethics

I have already mentioned some of the ethical challenges with which I was presented during the course of the fieldwork and will discuss these in depth during the forthcoming chapters. As well as employing pseudonyms for participants (see Participants section above), it was also necessary in some instances, due to the sensitivity and potential damaging consequences of some staff comments, to further “smudge” their identities. On such occasions, I refer to some members of staff by alphabetical letter, for example Staff A, Staff B, and make no reference to their gender or their status within the school. In a similar vein, I avoid attributing ethnicity and subject area against individual names in the staff list that is provided as part of Appendix 2.

Chapter 4 Academic Success: who is successful and why.

This chapter begins by exploring how staff at Metropolitan High school define academic success. This is a clearly an important starting point since although participants share and are situated within the same school context, individual and group experiences and hence accounts of success will vary. I attempt, therefore, to draw out some of the similarities and marked differences in these definitions before proceeding to discuss the same processes for the academically successful pupils.

Staff

"There is a political definition, there's a personal definition and there's a school definition because of the political definition." Ms Hill¹ (Support staff)

The section starts by focusing on how staff define academic success and how they perceive it to be understood by pupils. I then continue by examining the factors which staff feel shape or influence success in pupils.

Definitions of academic success

In very basic terms, staff reported that they regarded academic success as the positive increment in pupil performance from point of entry to the school compared with the grades or level² attained when they left. Embedded in this perspective was the significance that staff placed on the tests³ and assessments that pupils experienced throughout their school life. In this way, academic success meant a pupil either reaching some prior or expected level of attainment or, alternatively, achieving beyond that level.

Academic success as expected academic attainment

The tests sat by pupils at the end of each key stage allowed teachers to establish not only current pupil attainment but served as a basis of predicting what they felt the pupil would achieve later in their school life:

"Academic success is a student achieving as near as to their maximum potential

¹ All names, including that of the school, are pseudonyms.

² See Literature Review and Chapter 4 for further discussion of assessment procedures.

³ Standard Assessment Tests (SATs) are taken at the end of each key stage. See Chapter 4 for further details.

as possible, whatever that was be it high level or low level, as a result of the input from the school: the effective teaching and effective learning." Mrs Wright (SMT)

It is evident from this comment that academic success is seen as relatively fixed; that is, there is a "maximum potential" or a ceiling to how much a pupil is considered able to achieve. The role of the school, and by implication, the teacher therefore is to simply enable the pupil to reach this expected level, demonstrating, according to Mrs Wright that "effective teaching and effective learning" has occurred. In terms of beginning to think about notions of equity, this ceiling of possible achievement is not dissimilar to the more familiar employment glass ceiling that serves to limit the extent of progression and promotion for women and many Black and minority ethnic groups (e.g. Sanglin-Grant & Scheidner, 2000). In this case, the ceiling hinders the possibility of an unlimited academic success for pupils according to their perceived "potential". As will become apparent in later chapters, the level of this ceiling is determined not simply by the pupils' academic work but by a range of additional factors relating to their identity and lifestyle. Pupils are not expected to achieve equally, a view shared by Mrs Taylor:

"[Academic success is] when students achieve their best, *whatever that is*, erm within, you know, each subject. I don't think it is just, you know, getting their GCSEs at the end of Year 11 (...)" Ms Taylor (teacher) [emphasis added]

Such portrayal of academic success implies, on initial reading, a liberal, open attitude where it depends entirely on the individual and is independent of external factors, thus appearing to contradict Gillborn & Youdell's (2000) concept of the A-to-C economy that indicates that teachers are constrained by the need to attain higher grade passes at GCSE and, therefore, define success strictly in these terms (see especially page 43). However, while Ms Taylor's comment is not framed by references to "potential", as with Mrs Wright, her analysis nonetheless leaves room for subjectivity and low expectations since the very extent of "best" is subject to individual interpretation and judgement. To put this a different way, what one teacher accepts as a pupil's best may be challenged and not accepted by another. The following remark by a member of the Maths department, while extreme compared to those from other Met. staff, demonstrates the danger of these subjectivities more clearly:

"[Academic success is about] exam passes...GCSEs. The best level you can get for who you are, *so if a pretty dim kid gets a G, that's cool!* You know who they are, they're not all gonna be As or A stars or even Cs, you know." Staff E [emphasis added]

Here, the judgement about the extent of the pupil's intellectual capabilities restrictively positions him⁴ as "pretty dim", therefore, serving as a marker of what this pupil is able to achieve. The negative consequences of this for the pupil are reflected by the fact that his obtaining a G at GCSE – a level 1, low status grade⁵ – is reconstituted by Staff E as "cool" or, in other words, as entirely acceptable. To draw on Ms Taylor's language, G is regarded as the "best" that this pupil can achieve. A "pretty dim kid" cannot be expected to do better. In addition, the comments from both Ms Taylor and Staff E suggest a confident reliance on school assessment and tests and their predictive capacity and, significantly, as effective indicators of academic success. Such pattern of thought is evident in relation to staff views about the possible success of pupils who have special education needs:

"Academic success is an individual child achieving to the best of their ability... If it's a statemented⁶ child, you know, who's come into school with a Level 3 and they achieve to their potential when they leave 5 years later, then for that child that's academic success." Ms Edwards (Headteacher)

I have demonstrated that academic success is limited not simply to performance in tests but is embedded in the perceived capabilities of the pupil. There was, however, an alternative albeit considerably less prevalent perspective to viewing academic success in terms of reaching an expected attainment level. I consider this next.

Academic success as exceeded attainment

Of twenty-two staff who were formally interviewed, just two described academic success in terms of the pupil *surpassing* the grade that had been predicted through testing:

"...if you're teaching someone who is gonna get a G at GCSE and they left school with a D, that's success. It's about taking someone from a level and exceeding *any* expectation..." Mr Bailey (teacher) [emphasis added]

Mr Bailey places some value on the predictions established through testing when he refers to someone who is "gonna get a G" but unlike his colleagues mentioned above the expected grade is perceived as a minimum level of acceptable achievement thus, it can be argued, allowing for a greater scope for achievement beyond the restrictive ceiling of the prediction. Of course, this

⁴ As will become apparent in the next chapter, boys were largely considered to be less likely of academic success compared with girls. I mirror this positioning in the text when making general reference to pupils merely as a means of highlighting prevalent staff discourse.

⁵ Level 1 relates to examination passes of A* to G at GCSE, level 2 relates to A* to C passes. While both sets of information are detailed in yearly performance tables, it is the former that are generally regarded (by parents, the media) as an indicator of a school's success.

⁶ A child whose learning difficulties are regarded as sufficiently severe to place them on the register of Special Educational Needs. The statement specifies the special educational provision the pupil should have and the type of school the child should attend. www.teachernet.gov.uk

does not preclude the possibility that the predicted grade may be low in the first place therefore invalidating the idea that this is an effective measure of success. However, it is clear that by adopting this version of academic success, there were particular repercussions on teaching and learning:

"Even if the tutors have said to them 'Right, I think you're gonna get a D', I don't accept that, I think they should aim higher because its almost like a self-fulfilling prophecy isn't it, well if you're gonna get a D, you get a D. So for me academic ...well the goal I set them academically, is as high as they can go and if I've been told a D, then I say well 'Aim for a B, so if you slip you will get a C'..." Ms Hill (Support Staff)

I have already mentioned that this view of success was held by a just two of the interviewed staff. It is also interesting to note that only one of these was a member of full time teaching staff and while there was not scope to do so in the present research, the extent to which these varying mindsets really shaped classroom practice and expectations of pupil achievement and the overall outcome of academic success, is clearly an area that warrants further attention.

From both the conversations with staff about how they view academic success and from observations and fieldnotes of the achievement evenings held at the school, it became apparent that staff regard it as more than merely academic performance.

Academic success as more than just grades - or how the government has got it wrong

As shown above, staff at Metropolitan High School refer to academic success in terms of academic attainment and grades. I made the point that success was not limited to A* to C grades but extended beyond this and was tied up in staff perceptions about what they felt an individual pupil was able to achieve. In this section, I consider some of the basis for staff resistance of the A to C economy and the related methods of assessment and show that it is very much based on the way in which staff view Met's pupil population. This resistance is clearly reflected in the following statements:

"I hate this government, the previous government, they sort of say you have to have a C ...I mean if you get a D, that's hard to get. To say 'well sorry D is no good', I mean I just hate that idea, so whatever grades you get – as long as you do your best." Mr Condon (teacher)

"I think there is an awful lot of pressure on schools because of league tables really. The pressure is on for them to see it [academic success] more and more in the narrowest of terms, you know how many children got a certificate and how many achieved the magic A to Cs..." Mrs Simmons (Support staff)

While Mr. Condon's condemnation of governmental policy specifically critiques both the current New Labour government and the preceding Conservative office⁷, both sets of comments reveal a dissatisfaction and frustration with the way in which those external to the school view academic success. Further, the government and government policy is not simply depicted as limited in its definition and measurement of academic success, but it is conveyed as detached from and naïve of the realities of everyday schooling practice. The deputy head encapsulates these points well:

"The government is really running the show, you know, they have been for years and years and years and they have been putting pressure on schools to compete with each other, to prove, you know, that one school is better than another. They've got absolutely no idea [*chuckles, shakes his head, and sighs in exasperation*] about how to measure improvement; you know the idea of value added. So you'll get kids come into certain schools, selective schools that in fact they should all get A stars, they should all go on to universities and get wonderful degrees at Oxford and Cambridge in fact they don't but they are still seen as incredibly well performing schools and you get schools such as Met. where the students come in where in fact they do achieve - not as highly academically as a whole, as some of the other schools or but we still get students entered for GCSE Maths and Languages, in Year 8, Year 9 and Year 10, which a lot of those schools don't do that. So we do get sort of our cohort of very able students but there are a whole lot of other things we do which are not measured but the government are not interested in measuring those things." Mr Foster (SMT, Gifted & Talented Co-Coordinator)

Mr Foster reveals a number of interesting points here. Firstly, the perceived hierarchical, powerful and remote position of the government is apparent but the comment also highlights the competitive environment in which Metropolitan High operates with other schools, at the behest of this government. Finally, Mr Foster through his comments about Met not being regarded as a legitimate competitor in the struggle to be perceived as a "well performing school" and through his body language shares something of his frustration and, I would suggest, helplessness in response to the situation. Met is conveyed as possessing relatively little power, both in relation to other schools (with whom it is in competition) and in relation to a disinterested government.

In response to this position, Met. staff problematise the very definition of academic success (as being merely about A* to C grades) advocating that it be broadened to encompass additional factors that better pertain to its catchment area and the type of pupil it attracts. This nicely relates back to the earlier observations that the definition of academic success is seen as embedded in the perceived capabilities of the pupil himself:

"We've got a reputation as a school that is good with children with Special Educational Needs, so some of them kids just aren't gonna get...they're just not gonna get five A to

⁷ At the time of the research, 2002, New Labour had been in office for 5 years, having been re-elected in the 2001 elections. The Conservative Party's term of office lasted from 1979 to 1997.

Cs but I think it's, you know, how they come out of the school, if they've got self-esteem and they feel they can go out there and get a job, depending on what level they're at."
Ms Taylor (Teacher)

Here, academic success is reframed as being about self-perception and self-esteem. There is an acknowledgement that pupils with a profile of special educational needs are not, staff feel, going to produce the high status academic success espoused by selective schools (referred to earlier by Mr Foster) or the government. It can be said that these pupils, therefore, are not seen as high status in the context of helping Met to compete with other schools and be seen as well performing. This issue is compounded by the fact that Metropolitan High practiced, staff maintained, an open and fair admissions policy - "We take all comers here; we'll take everybody and anybody", Mr Brown -, by accepting all pupils, unlike some of the neighbouring schools:

"...a lot of the children in the area are creamed by other schools erm because we still have grammar schools, call them what you will erm, you see one over there [*points through the window*] where the nice girls go? Selective, though they pretend not to be. So we don't get first pick, if we get able children, it's sort of by chance really." Mr Condon (teacher)

"You will find that in every borough there are always two or three schools that always hover around the twenty per cent⁸ but you got to sort of look at the intake... Most schools now say that they're not selective, but it is [*sic*]!" Mr Brown (teacher)

Both sets of comments evocatively express some of the unfairness in the admissions process felt by these members of staff but what they do even better is emphasize the very way in which some pupils are regarded as better quality or status than others. Met. it is clear, is a rare recipient of such pupils.

Other teachers felt that in addition to controlling for, or at least acknowledging, the role of school catchment area further factors, such as a reduction in unauthorised absences⁹ or reading progression, ought to be recognised nationally as indicative of a school's overall success:

"Some people, like the government, might look at this school say it's not doing well but it is sometimes not reflected in the criteria for assessing success... A to C may not to be the best measurement of success...even getting children to read is a big deal in schools such as this, it doesn't necessarily affect your A to C grades but you have made progress." Mr Bailey (teacher)

"We've got amazingly talented athletes at this school. We have very talented rappers. We have lots of things that the pupils do which if you don't dig deep enough you don't

⁸ This refers to the improvement the school has made each year in the percentage of eligible pupils attaining five or more A* to C grades at GCSE and GVNQ. The figures for the 3 years preceding the current research are: 20% (1999), 19% (2000), and 18% (2001), well below the LEA average and against a national average of 48%, 49% and 50% respectively.

⁹ Between 2001 and 2002, there had been a 5% reduction in unauthorised absences at Metropolitan High.

actually see.” Mr Foster (SMT)

While both Mr Bailey and Mr Foster make a pledge for a wider version of success the new areas that they wish to be incorporated is significant. While Mr Bailey wants recognition of improvement in reading, which has clear implications for future academic work, Mr Foster focuses on rapping and sports which are entirely removed from the academic terrain. Indeed it is unclear how a focus on rapping as a form of success could lead to long term beneficial gains for pupils once they have left school as it does not position those pupils on an equal footing with those who have formal academic qualifications recognised by employers and further and higher education institutions. I say more about this particular comment in Chapter 6 when discussing forms of dress and demeanour.

As I mentioned earlier, some staff felt that success should also incorporate recognition of personal and social development and not simply focus on academic qualifications:

“Academic success, simplistically means the grades pupils achieve but there are clearly other forms of success which aren’t academic, which aren’t recognised er, personal qualities, more practical application of knowledge...things that are outside the National Curriculum remit... I think if a pupil gets an A grade in English or Science or whatever, they are lauded and they feel a real sense of achievement and that’s fantastic but if a pupil gets an award for being – I’m making this up – for being a supportive group member, I don’t think that is recognised and I think that is part of the reason that this school is a problem school as well. The system strives on achievement and education as being academic and I don’t think education should be academic. I think it should be more holistic.” Ms Wilson (Head of subject area)

Met. is regarded as a “problem school” because it is not seen to be achieving well compared to average performance across the local authority. Here, Ms Wilson’s emphasis is different from Mr Brown and Mr Condon in that she attempts to locate the problem of the definition of academic success within the areas of the curriculum that are regarded as high status as opposed to the problem being located in the type of pupil that the school attracts. Yet, by regarding part of the school’s “problem” to be the fact that it does not recognise achievement in lesser status areas, by implication suggests higher status academic success is not something that pupils at Metropolitan High do well. Unlike some of her colleagues, Mrs Simmons argues for a balance of both the academic and the interpersonal in each pupil:

“It’s quite difficult really, you can look at it [academic success] in the very narrow sense in terms of what certificates is a child leaving school with and some people would just see that as the only sort of success. I tend to look at it more as the development of that individual while they are at school...what we like to see is children developing their own personal potential erm but also in a broader sense as well, developing, helping to develop decent young people who are confident but also have a, you know, sense of community spirit; the sort of children, who are going to make nice citizens once they leave school.” Mrs Simmons (Support staff)

Almost half of the members of staff interviewed for this research viewed as significant the role of positive social skills in the process of acquiring academic success; skills which were attainable through the Citizenship subject area or, through extra sessions that students took with support staff. One teacher completely rejected this social skill-academic link, insisting instead that the emphasis on the acquisition of qualifications was entirely justified:

- | | |
|---------|---|
| Staff E | "...all the other stuff about school or the person or social it's all nonsense, all bollocks..." |
| NR | "The social and personal?" |
| Staff E | "Yeah, all of that stuff, 'preparing you for Citizenship' and all that, you know, stuff they talk about at assembly? It's nonsense! What we're doing is giving you qualifications. You got the qualifications, you can make money; if you don't have the qualifications, you don't make money!" |

I highlight Staff E's remark merely to pay heed to the fact that while overall similarities in patterns of discourse and practice were observed at Met., there were rare extremities. This particular member of staff was mentioned by some members of staff and a number of male pupils as someone with whom they found it difficult to get on.

I have shown that based on interview data most staff at Metropolitan High School were frustrated with the narrowly-defined governmental measures of academic success. Not only did many teachers reject the rigidity of measurement of five or more A* to C grades at GCSE in favour of recognising individual academic progression but most also maintained that success should incorporate further variables such as reduction in unauthorised absence and reading progression. The unwillingness to subscribe to, and indeed attempt to rewrite, the tacit rules of the A to C economy (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000) was due, in part, to the perception that their position in the education marketplace was unfairly disadvantaged due to the school catchment area, the high intake of 'low status' pupils and their just application of the school's admission policy. All of these factors were seen by staff to reduce Metropolitan High's position an equal competitor with other schools in shaping the percentage of pupils capable of conventional academic success.

Perception of pupils' definitions of academic success

Understanding how staff feel pupils describe academic success may complement and extend understanding of their own definitions and give some indication of how they view the mindset and attitudes of the pupils they teach. In considering how different groups of pupils become academically successful, it is also helpful to take account of the extent to which staff feel they

are teaching pupils with very similar or different perspectives from their own and how this might affect their practice.

The broad consensus from Met. staff was that pupils would define academic success in terms of qualifications and, in particular, the acquisition of A to C grades at GCSE:

"They see it in terms of exam performance." Ms Nicholson (Support staff)

"[As] achieving the best grades, namely five or more A to C grades..."
Mrs Hempscott (SMT)

Success for pupils then, according to these staff members, was very unambiguous and absolute. There is little space for the possibility of individual interpretation or the "fuzziness" which characterised staff definitions which subscribed to notions of "best" and "potential". Nor did there appear to be mention of testing and assessment as guidelines for ascertaining what "best" might mean. Pupils held these perceptions of academic success, staff felt, due to the influences of parties external to the school:

"I think if you went from one school to another there would be a general sort of consensus about how well you do at GCSE, they would see that, and I think a lot of that comes from their parents. Their parents are sort of moving through a system, a similar system and all this sort of stuff from the media about league tables and what the government says about, you know, what constitutes a good school and all this is being fed to parents and it's partially right and I think that most students sort of hit on that." Mr Foster (SMT, Gifted and Talented Co-ordinator)

Centring on the pivotal role of the media and the government in shaping parents' views about the "good school", highlights how little influence teachers are seen to have in affecting pupils' GCSE attainment. This lack of agency reiterates and corroborates the feelings of teacher helplessness and powerlessness that I referred to earlier and at the same time problematises the very nature of the teacher's role, an analysis also evident in the following statement by a member of the support staff:

"(...) I think it could be media, it could be expectation that they've heard from other students that A, B or a C will get you to go to college and also it is also reaffirmed if they want to do a particular thing, a particular, er, course and you look at the course book and it does say the requirements so it's through all of those reinforcements, a lot of those external things that they would feel that that's a success: an A, B or a C."
Ms Hill (Support staff)

Like Mr Foster, Ms Hill's response also leaves silent the voice and influence of teachers and support staff at Metropolitan High. By contrast the media is portrayed by both members of staff as very influential. Ms Hill's identification of "those external things" categorising success in terms

of an A, B or a C implies that they are outside her and her Met. colleagues' perceptions. While not all staff expressed this point of view, they nonetheless sought to absolve themselves of any personal responsibility in influencing the pupil view that academic success meant a focus on C grades and above:

"Well, a lot of them [pupils] will see themselves as failures if they don't get a C because that's constantly, er, said to them by the government really and in a way, er, Senior Management..." Mr Condon (teacher)

"I think that most of them would think that yes you have to have the top grades to be a success because this is...you know, it's not only [the] influence of an individual teacher, it's not only the influence of school or messages you try to give to them in the classroom, obviously the outside world whether it's the media or parents *and some teachers* [says these last three words slowly, with emphasis] and, you know, a lot of members of staff are guilty of that themselves..." Mrs Fitzpatrick (teacher)

Both Mr Condon and Mrs Fitzpatrick assign a degree of culpability to colleagues who subscribe to and practice a definition of success in terms of "the top grades". The strength of this is clearly conveyed through Mrs Fitzpatrick's emphatic reference to "and some teachers" and her use of the word "guilty", indicating the severity with which she judges her colleagues' behaviour. It also transpired that the dichotomy between the prevalent staff view of success as "achieving as near as to their maximum potential" and the perception that pupils saw it in stricter terms of A to C grades, could present a challenge to teachers' classroom practice:

"...so they're saying, 'We want to do this Miss. We want, er, to get the A to Cs but they don't understand that unless they have those literacy levels...it's very hard to make them understand that they won't achieve that. So in a way you've got to lower their expectations sometimes. You know and say 'Look at this point in your life, this is what you've got to do and later on when you've achieved that you can move on and achieve something else.' " Mrs Wright (SMT)

Mrs Wright's explanation regarding the necessity of good literacy to facilitate academic success is both reasonable and valid but seems contradictory to later complaints by some members of staff (see Chapter 5, p.71) that most pupils at Met. do not value education and the acquisition of qualifications. She suggests lowering expectations rather than perhaps challenging them to meet their goals and aspirations. The notion of lowering pupil expectations is concerning in view of the vast literature on raising academic achievement (especially of pupils from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds) that recognises the dangers of low teacher expectations in restricting pupil progress (see for example: Tomlinson, 1983; Gibson & Barrow, 1986; Wright, 1992; Gillborn, 1990, 1995). A similar criticism about unrealistic expectations was also levelled at parents, who as shown above, were also thought to describe success in terms of qualifications:

“...it is important that school develops culture where pupils know that they are here to learn but to also achieve personal best according to their personal potential not by what the government deems is, you know, is gold star. And the dilemma you have with that is convincing parents of that because you have your Year 9 options evening and you are trying to get parents to understand that you know...if a subject is more academic they want their child to do that because it is seen as a more academic subject. It's got kudos, it's got status but as an educator its no use putting your... their child into that subject if the child is not going to achieve. If the child is going to struggle that is demotivating for the child and it destroys their self-esteem and *our job is having the ability to persuade parents and to get parents to realise and understand what is best for their child.*” Ms Edwards (Headteacher) [emphasis added]

Like her colleagues mentioned earlier, Ms Edwards' reveals further evidence of a discrepancy between the overall school's desire to encourage pupils to achieve success in terms of “their personal potential”, and those very different standards advanced by external parties, in this case the government. Parents are portrayed as unrealistic in their ambitions for their children and as needing to be convinced of their child's “personal potential” which is seen as at odds with the unattainable high standards demanded by the government. This need to argue the case, to persuade parents of their child's personalised and lower level capabilities is regarded, by Ms Edwards as part of the job and contradicts some staff accounts (see Chapter 2 – Academic Failure) that parents do not value education and, continues to feed a culture of low pupil expectations.

I have shown that while staff definitions of academic success presented draw on a discourse relating to individual potential allowing room for subjectivity judgement, their perception of pupils definitions are more fixed and relate to the acquisition of high status grades and qualifications. Aside from simply exploring staff definitions of academic success, I was also interested in gaining an understanding of whether, and if so which, particular pupils were regarded as able to achieve academic success and how increased academic success could be facilitated. I examine these issues in the next section.

Determinants of academic success

Broadly speaking, when staff were questioned about *which* pupils were more likely to be successful or how one might identify academically successful students, four overarching issues emerged from their responses: pupil characteristics; ability¹⁰; social class and, family structure/home environment.

¹⁰ Though mentioned in the context of pupil characteristics, “ability” was so prevalent an issue that it will be discussed separately.

Pupil Characteristics

The pupils that staff felt were most likely to do well academically were those considered to be enthusiastic, capable of monitoring their own study and willing to try new things:

Ms Jones	(Support staff) "[Academically successful pupils are the ones who are] enthusiastic and have a go at all the range of topics and things you have to do in the classroom and display all the skills you have in the classroom."
NR	"Skills such as?"
Ms Jones	"Answering questions... asking questions as well, not just answering questions, getting down to the work; that they are interested in what they are learning and that they've got the ability to see what they are learning and perhaps asked for extension work so it does show they are enthusiastic, they are capable and they are using all their skills."

Ms Jones describes a clear image of the characteristics of the successful student. The mention of the pupil's enthusiasm is, in my view, particularly noteworthy in light of earlier staff comments which reflected their desire to dampen the academic aspirations of some pupils. I contend that these pupils, their eagerness muted, are unlikely to demonstrate the type of enthusiasm that would support their portrayal as successful.

Academically successful pupils were those who had adopted or developed the 'correct' attitude to education, enhanced by a determination and motivation to succeed:

"You *have* to be a self-learner. You have to take responsibility for your own learning. You can't rely on teachers. It *has* to come from you. You *have* to have self-discipline, you *have* to be organised, you *have* to be self-motivated, you *have* to remain on task. You have to be very aware of where you are and where you are gonna go as well. If you are a level 5 - how you're gonna get to level 6¹¹..." Mr Brown (teacher)

The conviction in Mr Brown's observation is conveyed by the brevity of the sentences and the imperative use of the verb 'to have'. His description of the academically successful student focuses on her motivation and self-awareness with no particular reference to how these skills and styles are acquired. The instruction that pupils cannot rely on teacher again poses questions about the how teachers see their role.

Asked how an academically successful student might be identified, the headteacher gave the following response:

¹¹ National Curriculum levels. See Chapter 4.

"Some people get on in life not because they are educated but it's their attitude. You know and your attitude says everything about you, your attitude will open doors for you, your attitude, you know, will get you into places or get people to think 'Gosh you know, he hasn't got the erm, you know the skills, but he has got the potential, I like his attitude' and that's what will help you to get on. Because you know, all the nurturing or whatever, if you don't want to achieve then you know it's the analogy of taking the donkey to the water." Ms Edwards (Headteacher)

While initial staff definitions of academic success focus on "ability", "best" and "potential" as a forms of capped or ceiling attainment which vary according to the individual pupil, determinants of success also appear to be dependent on particular personalised characteristics, beyond the simple performance of academic work. Academic success is not merely tied up in notions of attainment or potential but in the willingness to answer in class, enthusiasm, self-motivation and here, possessing and demonstrating the "correct" attitude. For other teachers academic success could also be evidenced through the types of conversations they were able to have with certain pupils. These pupils often displayed an analytical style of thinking, were able to use a broad range of vocabulary and relay information in detail:

"I was talking to the whole class and we was [*sic*] talking about a programme we saw on telly, erm *The Abyss*. It was about: they went down further than they've been before to the bottom of the sea. You know, just because some were watching it was a step above, that some were interested. The academically gifted ones...certainly there's a science in that...the fact that they could discuss the matter, they could discuss it in terms not 'oh yeah did you see the size of that shark? Wow!' That, you know, is interesting, [that] they showed interest in something but it doesn't show that they were looking at it from a cerebral point of view. When they say 'but I thought the pressures at that depth would crush the thing', you know they are sort of questioning the thing and they are going onto a higher level than just like looking and waiting for some action to happen. They are asking valid scientific questions and that shows some thinking. Just the fact they watched it wouldn't be enough." Mr Bailey (teacher)

Mr Bailey's comment indicates that it is not just being able to engage in discussion but the actual depth of conversation which took place which was indicative of how pupils construed and interrogated their environment which he saw as related to academic success. The particular relationship or interaction between pupil and teacher was also considered a marker of academic success often signified through the pupil's conversational adeptness:

- | | |
|-----------------|--|
| NR | "How would I be able to tell which ones are successful?" |
| Mrs Fitzpatrick | (teacher) "Erm, vocabulary; how they answer your questions; how they respond, you know, interact." |
| NR: | "And how would they respond, interact?" |
| Mrs Fitzpatrick | "They probably would be more interested when you are talking they would be more vocal. They will be more willing and able to express whether, er, their concerns and grievances and comment on whatever you ask them. The others would be maybe more shy, withdrawn or you |

will get one sentence er, I mean, in general. You would have to talk to the person."

These observations from both Mr Bailey and Mrs Fitzpatrick present academically successful pupils as verbally and demonstratively confident¹².

Organisational skills were commonly listed by staff as a prerequisite for academic success since pupils needed to be able to cope with the demands of coursework and examination preparation. This was an area in which girls were perceived as most adept, which by implication portrayed boys as less academically successful:

"...there is more pressure now to study, you have to have your coursework handed, there's [s/c] your deadlines, you have to study your intermediate exams. It's more like a drip effect. It is part of the reason girls are better than boys... girls tend to be more organised, more pragmatic, they meet the deadlines, they get the work in, they hand it in, it gets marked and handed back to them..." Mr Brown (teacher)

Ms Hill explained why she felt girls did better than boys:

"Cos we're multifaceted that's why [says in mock matter of fact voice; both laugh] We do all these things, we're using our brains all the time. We are doing all these other things that we have got to juggle and think about and whatever and - that's a totally sexist remark! Strike that from your thing!" [laughs again] Ms Hill (Support staff)

The perception of a gender difference in organisational and motivational skills both automatically 'upskills' girls as competent and, deskills boys as incompetent simply on account of their gender, so that being a girl is regarded as higher status to the school's goals of being well performing compared with the lower, unhelpful status of being a boy. A similar discourse existed in relation to maturity, which endowed pupils, again usually girls, to be sufficiently confident, self-aware and to recognise and seek help if needed. The extent to which these attributions about gender difference remained fixed and served to perpetuate a dichotomy between male and female pupils is unclear although as I show in Chapters 5 and 6, when discussing Academic Failure and Dress and Demeanour respectively, perceptions about gender operate alongside perceptions about other social constructs of ethnicity and social class that tend to situate particular groups of pupils as less likely of academic success than others.

I have shown that the pupils who were perceived as academically successful were expected to display a range of characteristic qualities, which included enthusiasm, verbal competence, confidence and good organisational skills. I later interrogate whether simply demonstrating the features cited here was sufficient to contribute to an image of academic success and argue that

¹² The extent to which these beliefs shape staff treatment of pupils is explored further in Chapter 4.

these *a priori* assumptions made about which pupils are academically successful is self-reinforcing and exclusionary.

Family Structure & home environment

Staff also made a number of inferences about family background, home environment and their alleged relationship to academic achievement in pupils. For the most part, these views were most explicit when discussing families and lifestyles which staff felt hindered academic achievement but some specific observations were made about those which facilitated success.

"I think there's all sort of factors [that make a student academically successful]. I do think parental support is absolutely vital, absolutely vital - not just parental support but parents who value education and you know, who encourage their children to enjoy school and who take it seriously if their children play truant or disrupt classes and that sort of thing and really co-operate with the teaching staff...so I do think home is important..." Mrs Simmons (Support staff)

The parents of pupils who were academically successful were seen to be those who valued education and were able to pass this attribute on to their children. Importantly, they co-operated with the school in educating their child by abiding with school rules, for example, through ensuring their child arrived at school on time or through regular attendance at parents' evenings¹³. Growing up in an environment conducive to learning was, according to staff, crucial in the acquisition of academic success and comments about suitable home environment appeared to reveal some particular personal beliefs and biases against certain pupils:

"I mean obviously if you've got a stable home life, two parents, you got your own bedroom with a computer in it, you know you're obviously find it easier than if you're from a single parent family, you got 2 or 3 younger brothers or sisters to look after and you're helping mum cook tea. You know the two type of students are gonna be very very different when it comes to actual learning." Mr Brown (teacher)

Striking in Mr Brown's remark is the depiction of the family at either end of his stable-unstable home life continuum so that the extremes represent the ideal and worse scenarios but arguably pupils positioned away from those extremes, perhaps from a single parent family but with no siblings, may in Mr Brown's equation have a better opportunity to learn than one with siblings. The problem with his analysis is the unquestioning way in which he reads causality in pupil attitude to learning to home environment setting up pupils in the "wrong" environment as automatically more likely to fail.

Social Class

¹³ Parent evening attendance is examined further in Chapter 2.

Pupils from middle class backgrounds were seen to value education and understand the concept of success. It was also argued that the parents in these families acted as positive role models for their children through the fact that they had usually attended higher education and pursued professional careers themselves:

- Mr Sanderson (teacher) "...achievement just doesn't come through school. If you spend most of your life out of school it's the background that er, you, you grow up in that influences, er, you know, your academic achievement. A lot, er, I don't know, I can't say in percentage terms but, you know, basically kids from fairly better, more well off, middle class backgrounds achieve academically more than kids from difficult, you know, who live in, erm, who come from poorer families. I think there is definitely a whole set of social and economic factors which disadvantage certain groups and advantage others."
- NR "Can you give me an example (...) of what you think some of those factors are?"
- Mr Sanderson "Well, I mean erm, social class. I think middle class parents tend to be erm they have seen the system, they have been through the system and the system has worked for them and they're more aware of it and I think they probably feel they are better able to support their kids through it. They know more about how the rules, how the system works. They're more familiar with the vocabulary of everything and they have had probably had more of a formal education themselves and can support their kids through it. Erm basically they know the rules and how the system works more - they're are better able to support their kids through it. They are more likely to have more money erm so I think on average, I know people who, they probably got more time to devote to their kids. If you're not as well off you could be working all hours to try to keep the family going, you have got more stress as well, perhaps you're less patience with your kids sometimes if you're in that sort of environment. There's something in housing as well - if you're more well off you live in a bigger house, you got access to books and other facilities, you can pay for your kids to go to piano lessons and learn music and stuff like that."

According to Mr Sanderson students from middle class backgrounds were advantaged in a number of ways. The parents of these students, having passed through the education system themselves, understood the codes and rules to guide their children through the system successfully (see Ball, 2003:83). Financially, they were also in a position to provide material resources to enhance their child's education by providing for example a space to study, a computer, books or through broader personal development, such as learning music. In Chapter 9, I discuss the way in which possession of these resources can be viewed in Bourdieuan terms as forms of cultural capital, the absence of which can disadvantage some pupils.

However, a few teachers who linked social class with academic attainment also commented on the role of ethnicity, conceding that the relationship between the three was complex:

"I think class, ethnicity, gender interrelate and it is very difficult to pull them apart. I don't think those factors necessarily make you more successful than somebody else, I think the way you are *perceived* is different. I don't think being white middle class and whatever makes you more academically successful but I think you've got more *chances* of being more academically successful because if you come from a middle class home where your parents are educated and you're surrounded by books, you go to an independent school of course you are gonna be more successful and of course achievement figures are higher and of course if you go to a school if you have more attention then of course, I mean nobody is academically successful on their own..."
Ms Wilson (Head of subject area)

"...we have a growing cohort of Black middle class students who are achieving much much better, in a way than the working class white students are achieving in school. You know if you look at the figures white middle class students tend to achieve as do Black middle class students but that's the socioeconomic background you know but that's a generalisation, there are others who tend to achieve too." Mrs Hempscott (SMT)

Here, Ms Wilson echoes a similar perspective as Mr Sanderson, in regarding white middle class pupils as having more capital than their working class peers. While her observation is classed and situates working class pupils as less likely of success it is also, in her specific reference to whiteness ethnicised, indicating a particular advantage of being both white and from a middle class background. This also reveals that she does not feel that Black middle class pupils have the same capital or advantage as their white counterparts to achieve academically.

Of the twenty two staff interviewed, Mrs Hempscott provided the only explicit positive reference during the course of the fieldwork to Black pupils achieving although pupils from a range of backgrounds were rewarded for their academic (and pastoral) achievements at the yearly achievement evenings. The comments about Black pupils were overwhelmingly negative and were centred on conversations pertaining to the way they dressed and behaved (see Chapter 6).

Ability

Reference to ability was common when staff attempted to describe factors that determined academic success. It was mentioned when describing types of individual pupil ability and, when referring to teaching groups that had been organised according to ability. For now I shall focus on the former definition. The latter is discussed in the context of staff treatment of different pupils in Chapter 8.

When asked to describe the types of pupils for whom success was easier, most staff, whether teachers or support staff made reference to pupils who had "the ability". There were, according

to prevalent staff opinion, two forms of ability. The first related to some perceived innate or biological state, that I have termed 'natural ability' and the second referred to a skill that a pupil was able to develop if they worked hard: that is, 'acquired ability':

"...there is a measure of innate ability surely, isn't there? Nature-nurture and all that. Alright there's both but people do start off, I'm sure with a certain amount of innate ability which is nothing to do with gender, nothing to do with their shape or size..."

Ms Nicholson (Support staff)

"...you will find that there may be a child that no matter where you throw them, they will be a success, but that's just the natural ability within them..." Ms Hill (Support staff)

Students who were able to grasp concepts and problems quickly and easily were said by staff to have innate ability.

"...I think, you know, if I've got, sort of, some people sit there and get a Maths question, hear the explanation the first time and understand it and never need to touch it again and they'll just remember it. I mean I've taught students like this, I wasn't a student like that erm, so you have these students that seem to have some sort of natural talent at a subject or varying subjects..." Ms Buckley (Head of subject area)

"There is definitely a natural ability and a natural lack of it. I mean I myself found spelling easy and I always enjoyed it but I've always found Maths difficult no matter what teachers I had or you know... So, you know, I mean there are some children who are really blessed and seem to be, to take everything, find most subjects easy (...)" Mrs Simmons (Support staff) [emphasis added]

Both members of staff use personal examples of their own past academic performance as a means of corroborating the alleged validity of natural ability. From an educational perspective, Mrs Simmons opinion, reflected in the views of her colleagues, that "there is definitely a natural ability and a natural lack of it" is extremely problematic as it situates some pupils as possessing "ability" as a result of their genes and others as being genetically inferior¹⁴. These staff members tended not to critique their beliefs but stated their views with a worrying degree of commonsense determinism. For those pupils born with out this 'natural ability' was the vague possibility of developing it later in life, though this, as the personal testimonies from the two staff, implies, is not necessarily guaranteed. Attaining this 'acquired ability' was the result of sheer determination and motivation on the part of the pupil:

"You've got natural ability but you have also got the ability of what they can actually do if they sit there and work properly the whole time... the students that have to work hard to achieve... Erm, we have students that do everything that they possibly could do, so at five o'clock they'll still be hanging around the school working somewhere and they're

¹⁴ Herrnstein & Murray (1994) have famously attempted a similar argument despite it being widely agreed that there being no biological basis for race (see Chapter 2 - Literature Review, p.20)

generally the ones that achieve to their potential, probably higher than we would expect them to when they come in at first..." Ms Buckley (Head of subject area)

Ms Buckley conveys the impression that acquired ability is synonymous with potential and potential was what pupils were expected to attain as determined through the testing and assessment procedures mentioned earlier (see Academic Success as Expected Attainment). Even though pupils might achieve higher than expected on entry to the school, this is attributed specifically to an aspect of or change in pupil behaviour; in this case their diligence. The effectiveness of the tests in actually possessing predictive worth remains uninterrogated. Again, the specific role and influence of the teacher remains unclear if not entirely questionable.

"Ability is having the capabilities or the skills or the potential to attain a certain level of achievement but having the er...having the capability for it to be drawn out. I think the basic structures are there and then for it to be drawn out and built on... each one [pupil] in effect would have their own different levels built upon. Whether they've taken the information and made it bigger, so they can increase their potential, increase their capabilities, is totally up to the individual." Ms Hill (Support staff)

In discussing how staff define academic success and the factors that influence it, I have shown how perceptions about Metropolitan High's positioning as a school operating within the wider context of school admissions and performance affect teacher morale and perspectives. Academic success is reframed to take account of the low status pupils that Metropolitan High attracts. Central to these debates are the varying and somewhat deterministic factors, based on family structure, home environment and personal characteristics that situate some pupils as more likely of academic success than others. White girls from middle class two parent families are seen to be advantaged academically which poses questions for pupils who do not fit this profile directly and, in particular those positioned at the opposite extreme, namely Black boys from working class backgrounds. These discussions on academic success are also fuelled by beliefs of innate ability with which all pupils are not equally born, although they might be able to acquire a form of ability should they work hard. These varying and complex interpretations of academic success were very different from those of the pupils' that these members of staff taught and it is these pupil perceptions that I am going to explore next.

Pupils

**“Academic success is when you achieve excellence through education” Natasha Wright
(Year 11, Black African Caribbean)**

As with the staff, I consider pupil constructions of academic success in three sections: definitions of success; determinants of success and, finally how they think members of staff describe academic success.

Definitions of academic success

When asked to provide a definition of academic success, pupils frequently described it in terms of the types of characteristics and behaviour they perceived to be associated with academically successful students (see *Determinants of success* below). Those references made to grades generally reflected a clear desire to achieve only the top marks:

“[Academic success is] probably students who are doing well in their subjects, getting good marks, marks that are quite high, passes. In GCSE there’s A, B, Cs – they’re passes. And Ds, I don’t think they’re passes. I’m not sure about Ds...”

Jeremy Jones (Year 10, white)

“I would describe it as if you get average in your GCSE which is C and then B is above average and A is really good and A* is excellent...”

Natalie Davidson (Year 10, Black Caribbean)

While this represents the views of just two students, it is interesting that their terms of reference and their understanding of academic success is confined to grades between A* and C. Note Jeremy’s uncertainty about the value of D grades and their complete lack of mention by Natalie. It is as if grades below C do not exist as part of the reality of these students who, it should be remembered have been chosen for involvement in the project by the school because they are academically successful. Other pupils, while appearing to value grades, stated that success should also pertain to development of personal characteristics. For example, one Year 11 pupil, Samuel Owusu, maintained:

“The grades are important obviously but you should basically leave school with a lot more understanding about oneself, you should know... you should know your limits, know maybe how to judge people. How to know people, your own personal self-situation, learn from them.” Samuel Owusu (Year 11, Black African)

His comment indicates the need for a focus on personal qualities such as individual development, communication and interaction skills as part of a wider model of success not unlike some of the staff discussed above. A similar perspective is shared by Natasha Wright (Year 11, Black Caribbean):

"I think if you are intelligent, you know how to play the games within life. Like always in school if you are not as clever and you left school with Cs and Ds then you can still get out there and you can achieve successfully, then you are intelligent because you have mastered that because you know how to do it."

Evident from Natasha's statement, as with her counterparts above, is high regard placed on the best grades. Achieving Cs and Ds are seen to be the remit of pupils who are not particularly clever though this she insists does not limit their capacity for overall success once they leave school.

The importance of succeeding academically

A* to C grades were important to these academically successful pupils because of the choice that they facilitated at age 16 and later in life. It was recognised that higher grades were a prerequisite for scholarships and for access to the courses pupils wanted to study in further and higher education which in turn had repercussions for employment opportunities. As a result, definitions of success were closely intertwined with the desire to attain these future goals:

"...they just want good grades...if you don't go for the scholarship you will pay the same amount as someone who got lower grades and you know didn't go for the scholarship as well. But they only accept you for the scholarship if you do good in the exam that they do and if you get good references from teachers." Efi Okpe (Year 11, Black African)

"I would describe it [academic success] as coming out with the qualifications that you need for your ideal job. If I was gonna be a psychiatrist I would need a like an A to C in Science GCSE to go on to do the A level." Michael McNamara (Year 11, Black Caribbean)

"I'm looking for a job what I enjoy. I wanna earn enough money so I can live comfortably. I don't wanna struggle, that's another reason why I try to be successful and get my grades. I don't mind working hard but as long as I don't have to struggle to live. And like if I have children in the future, I know I have something to put aside for them and I will be able to keep them as well as I keep myself. So I'm looking to the future as well." Simon Daniels (Year 11, Mixed heritage)

These remarks reflect the pupils' future aspirations. Their objectives are clear and demonstrate a pragmatic understanding of the stages necessary to achieve their goal. Others regard school as time-consuming so that to not do well at this point would essentially be time wasted. This attitude appeared to directly contribute to a determination to do well and fulfil personal aspirations:

"There's no way that I've been in education so long that I'm gonna throw it away to do

something I don't like, like cleaning the streets. I'm not saying it's a bad job, but personally, I don't think that that was worth eleven years of education... I'm gonna make sure that I get far in life." Michelle Cobham (Year 10, Black Caribbean)

"Everyone says 'when I grow up I wanna have a nice house, nice car'. If you don't have good grades you're gonna have like a mash up¹⁵ car and a little council flat or something... You could end up working in like Mark One¹⁶, and they'd like probably still want people with a few grades or something." Catherine Jackson (Year 11, Black British)

For Catherine low achievement at school means an unattractive and undesirable way of life later. She makes a direct connection between high grades and being able to afford material comforts she might want later in life such as a good car and house. Further both she and Michelle assign a hierarchical status to occupations which enables them to reject particular sectors that they see as low status and which do not fit in with their personal markers of success.

Determinants of academic success

An academically successful student was someone who worked hard. In fact this description was given by a third of the interviewed pupils and described those who made frequent use of homework diaries, completed and handed in home- and coursework on time, and who were likely to constructively engage in classroom activities:

"You should look out for hardworking people, or people, ... if their grades are good, they do good in school. See how they work in class, see what they do, how they respond to things, things like that." Justin Soloman (Year 10, Turkish Cypriot)

"[You should see if] they speak out loud in class, if they ask questions, when it comes to working they sit down and they do it, erm, they don't argue with teachers and they don't make noise." Jacob Agyako (Year 9, Black African)

"People who are not making too much noise or if they're having a conversation it's something that's interesting...like always getting your homework in and finishing coursework." Catherine Jackson (Year 11, Black Caribbean)

Academically successful students are also conscientious and likely to be fairly quiet. Catherine makes reference to the type of conversations in which such students were likely to be engaged; an observation also made by Year 10 student, Curtis Mayers (Black British):

"If you're speaking to someone involved in school work, sometimes the talk might be different 'cos some people...if you're academically successful and you're talking to someone that's the same you might be talking about Einstein's theory or something like

¹⁵ "Mash up" is slang, in this context meaning ugly, old or battered.

¹⁶ Mark One (spelt 'Mk One') is a young women's high street fashion chain selling clothes and accessories at discounted prices.

that but if, erm, you're talking to someone who's not academically successful, you might just ask them 'what was the homework?' or whatever. If you're very bright and academically successful your discussion tends to usually be more - oh I just had a word in my head and I can't remember it - more intellectual chats, kinda things but then if you're talking to someone who isn't, it's just normal."

Both comments imply that conversations with academically successful students are distinct from those with less academically successful counterparts and usually more engaging. The observation that these conversations are "just normal" further implies that successful students possess distinct qualities that differentiate them from others and allows him to situate himself either as successful or, as having the qualities of an academically successful pupil

Pupils generally responded to questions to elicit whether certain groups of pupils were more likely to be academically successful than others, by referring back to the characteristics of successful students, described above. Very few generalisations were made but six (an equal number of male and female pupils) proposed that girls might be more likely to be successful compared with boys:

"As a percentage I would say there's [*sic*] about 40% [of students in Met who are academically successful]. About 25% of them would be girls and the rest would be boys."

Curtis Mayers (Year 10, Black British)

"...they say that girls are more mature than boys so maybe they have bit more self control, so may be able to study better..."

Michael McNamara (Year 11, Black Caribbean)

Others suggested that academically successful students, being more likely to subscribe to school rules, were likely to wear the correct uniform¹⁷ and be smartly attired:

"...the ones who wear perfect school uniform every day and they're never told to change their trainers or put on their blazers..."

Natasha Wright (Year 11, Black Caribbean)

"The way they wear their uniform, they are smart, they probably have it ironed. If you ironed it, then it shows that you probably actually care about how you look and how people look at you."

Catherine Jackson (Year 11, Black British)

However, there was a general consensus, as with a minority of the teachers, that such a distinction was simplistic and stereotypical:

¹⁷ This was a formal requirement specified in the school prospectus handed out to all parents. See Chapter 3 for detailed discussion of this topic.

"[You look at] the way they [academically successful students] try to present themselves. You see who's got uniform on, who's got their tie right up to their neck, their top button on, their cuffs are ironed to perfection. I suppose that's stereotyping them." Samuel Owusu (Year 11, Black African)

"You can get the scruffy ones that wear trainers, shirt out, no tie, no blazer, and they could still be academically successful, they could be hard workers. It don't matter about what they look or what they wear how they're dressed." Nathan Johnson (Year 11, Black Caribbean)

Other pupils indicate that pupils who were most likely to be academically successful probably benefited from having supportive parents. Only one student, Jeremy Jones (Year 10, white) ruminated that specific parental skills might play a role in perpetuating success:

"Say if your parents are more clever, then maybe you'd be more likely to be clever than someone who has parents who were not academically successful but I'm not really sure, that's probably a guess."

However, like other pupils Jeremy conceded that the main factor determining academic success was hard work:

"But also kids do have to work hard and if someone doesn't work hard then they might not be as academically successful as someone who does work hard."

On the whole, pupils refrained from making broad generalisations that some distinct groups were more likely of success than others, finding such analysis this too crude and deterministic:

"To say that tall people with brown hair and brown eyes are successful but if they have green eyes they are not, it's not as simple as that." Samantha Philips (Year 10, white)

"It's nothing about their gender or anything like that. It's not about; it's no [sic] disability, nothing. It's not about who you are on the outside it's about who you are on the inside..."
Simon Daniels (Year 11, Mixed heritage)

While these pupils referenced A to Cs as indicative of academic success because they recognised that these grades offered them increased choice at 16 they were just as likely to attribute success to individual characteristics and attitude. Unlike the staff that taught them, pupils considered anyone capable of achieving academically providing they worked hard. For these pupils, attaining academic success was within the remit of every pupil.

Perception of teachers' definition of academic success.

Some pupils felt that teachers would describe academic success in terms of punctuality, attentiveness in class and the completion of homework. The most prevalent view, voiced by just over half of the twenty five interviewed pupils, was that teachers would define it with reference to

grades or, specifically the acquisition of A to C grades at GCSE. The importance of these particular grades was one that pupils maintained was advertised in a number of contexts throughout the school and was a message vociferously espoused by the headteacher and several teachers, as the following interview extract exemplifies:

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| NR | "If you were a teacher in this school, how would you define academic success?" |
| Natasha Taylor | (Year 11, Black Caribbean) "Something that is very important. That you are successful in every subject you do. You get good grades so that it can help you in the future." |
| NR | "What are good grades?" |
| Natasha | "Probably now, A to Cs." |
| NR | "How do you know that?" |
| Natasha | "We are being told that every day." |
| NR | "Who tells you?" |
| Natasha | "The teachers...that you can't pass if you get a D. It's just A to C." |
| NR | "What happens if you get a D or whatever?" |
| Natasha | "You just don't pass it. It's to help you in your career. Employers don't really like ...they are looking for an A to C grade student." |

It is not clear, since they were not included in this research, what messages less successful pupils were told about the significance of particular grades at GCSE. However, the above extract provides strong evidence that the way that these successful students thought about grades (shown through their definitions of academic success) and which ones were worth achieving is influenced by members of staff. This appears to contradict earlier staff accounts where they took no personal responsibility for these messages and where third parties were blamed for influencing pupils' perceptions about grades. Apparent here, despite a range of discomforts with the wider education system and the apparent liberal stance of success being defined as the best a pupil can attain, is a need to participate in and promote the discursive practice of the Gillborn & Youdell's (2000) A to C economy:

- | | |
|--------------|--|
| NR | "How do you think teachers describe academic success? What do you think it means to teachers?" |
| Daniel Clark | (Year 10, white) "I think it's getting a C and above. That's all they'd be proud of." |
| NR | "Really?" |

- Daniel "Yeh, they don't want their students to fail."
- NR "Right. So what's important about getting a C and above?"
- Daniel "I don't know it's just - it has a good name on it (...) especially towards the headteacher."
- NR "Oh really?"
- Daniel "Yeah."
- NR "How do you know that?"
- Daniel "Because our maths teacher told us that sometimes like erm Ms Edwards told us that all of us can take our exams in maths. She don't want us to get lower than a C otherwise she won't be too happy."

Here, we can see how D (which does represent a pass at GCSE), is reconstructed as a fail in order to encourage pupils to achieve the all-important C grades and above. Attaining below C is met with clear disapproval. While pupils explained that they were also encouraged to achieve these higher grades during lessons, their promotion was they explained more prevalent in certain subject areas:

- NR "Does anyone at school tell you that A to Cs are important?"
- Nathan Johnson (Year 11, Black African Caribbean) "They don't really tell us but I already know it's important already 'cos I get it from my mom, family. At school they don't really say like 'you have to get A to Cs' other than English."
- NR "That happens in English?"
- Nathan "Yeah, he tells us about we should be getting plenty of A to Cs to do well in our career and And in our further studies at college or whatever."
- NR "Do you learn about what A to Cs mean anywhere else, aside from PSHE¹⁸?"
- Justin (Year 10, Turkish Cypriot) "Yeah in English, Science, Maths and all that."
- NR "Right. What do you get told?"
- Justin "There's...our classes are split up into three groups: foundation, intermediate and higher. I'm in higher. They expect A to Cs from us. That's what they expect from us."

¹⁸ Personal, Social and Health Education.

"...the core subjects: English, Maths and Science. I don't think any of the other ones do matter. They [teachers] think it's like being more brainy if you know them than it is if you know the others." Daniel Clark (Year 10, white)

The emphasis placed on achieving higher grades in English, Mathematics and Science clearly demonstrates the high worth of these subject areas that is inextricably linked to their status as core subjects¹⁹ within the National Curriculum that all pupils must study.

Pupils' reactions to being encouraged to achieve A* to C grades varied. Although they felt that staff support and encouragement to do well primarily emanated from genuine feelings of care and concern about their futures they, like Gillborn & Youdell's (2000: 174) students, were generally suspicious of teachers' motives. Factors pertaining to the school, its reputation and the need for it to be perceived as achieving by external agencies were cited as more feasible reasons for teachers' keenness for them to succeed:

"I know they care for us, I know they want us to succeed and to get jobs but I think like a little part of my mind makes me think that they want the school to look good. Because in the past, yeah, there have been years where the results have been very good, there have been years where the results have been very very bad. So they want us to have one of the highest results. They want us to do well but they have gone about the wrong way to do it." Nicole Adams (Year 11, Black Other)

"I think it [academic success] means how other schools and teachers see them and how the students reflect on the school sort of, yeah. I think it's important to them, very important because it makes, if we have a good academic thing, then it will make the teachers look good and if we have a bad one, it will make them look bad obviously."
Michelle Gregory (Year 9, Black British)

These comments reflect teachers' lack of understanding of the experiences and perspectives of academically successful pupils. Their motives for encouraging pupils to achieve are not regarded as genuine, ultimately contributing to a picture of two distinct groups operating and existing for different reasons within the shared space of the school. The various ways in which teachers strove to ensure pupil acquisition of high grades is explored further in Chapter 8 and reveals both the sensitivities of pupil perception and their concern about differential treatment.

Discussion

In this chapter, I have considered staff and pupil definitions of academic success, the factors felt to facilitate academic success and how each feels the other group understands it.

¹⁹ Mathematics and Science became a statutory requirement for Key Stage 4 (14-16 year olds) from August 2001.

A striking finding is the way that staff at Metropolitan High on one hand describe academic success in seemingly liberal terms, maintaining that it can be understood as doing one's best or reaching one's potential. This *inclusive success* allows staff to reframe as positive the achievements of pupils not seen as capable of achieving the highest examination results but is a position tinged with paradox since it can also encourage as acceptable low expectations about the extent of pupil achievement. At the same time, evidence from the pupils reveals that staff actively and explicitly advocate the achievement of the highest grades at GCSE and, as I show in Chapter 8 operate in given ways to increase the probability of success at this level. This apparent contradiction in definition provides further support for Keddle's (1981) research where staff may wish in one to one conversation to appear well-meaning and liberal but once in the classroom are subject to the pressures and realities of the wider education system. This also reflects the importance of collecting data from a range of sources.

This chapter also reveals the way that for staff academic success is uncritically dependant on a wide range of factors relating to the pupil's characteristics, family background and lifestyle. This supports Becker's (1952) early work which found that characteristics such as verbal competence, confidence and a 'ready-to-learn' attitude reflected the "ideal pupil" for school staff. Teachers at Metropolitan High also leave themselves absent from these debates about how to facilitate academic success which both conveys their feelings of relative powerlessness in the context of the education system and, that they feel academic achievement is genuinely located within the pupil. By contrast, academically successful pupils regard achievement as attainable by any pupil and made little mention of family background or other dependent factors.

Talking with staff and pupils provided much of the data in this chapter about academic success. Clearly implications can also be drawn from these conversations about academic failure. Understanding how academic failure is conceived may help emphasis and clarify important areas regarding academic success and possibly reveal new areas of significance. Drawing both on interview data and observations from the fieldwork, I examine this area in detail in the next chapter.

Chapter 5 Academic Failure: Who fails and why.

In the previous chapter, I showed that Metropolitan staff think about success in two ways: in terms of a liberal, low status inclusive success and an exclusive, high grade academic success. As such academic failure can be argued to be the antithesis of both of these positions as a pupil not reaching their potential or, as not attaining high status grades. In this section, I attempt to both present new data as it relates to academic failure and, also make suggestions about academic failure based on what has been understood from the findings on success from Chapter 4.

Staff and pupil perspectives of academic failure and pupils who are less successful academically are examined. Exploring and understanding this area is important since it serves as a way of corroborating and supplementing the findings on academic success, introduced in the previous chapter. Observation and interview data from staff are categorised under three broad themes: pupil characteristics; key to academic success; and, family background. In the pupil section, I consider the themes of the characteristics of academically successful students and ways of addressing academic failure.

Staff

“ ‘Er, ‘scuse me but your kid’s an arsehole and isn’t working! You haven’t sussed that?’ ” Staff E

Unsurprisingly, in view of what has been examined in relation to academic success, the reasons staff cite for academic failure and for some pupils doing less well academically centred on personal factors to the pupil and their home life.

Pupil Characteristics

In comparison to staff description of their successful peers, less successful pupils can be identified as those who display little enthusiasm or curiosity when being taught, they also lack motivation, focus and the ability to engage in analytical conversation. Since successful students tend, according to staff reports to be female and to establish positive relationships with staff, this situates boys and those with poor relationship or no relationship with staff as less likely to do well.

Boys

Half of the twenty-two members of staff that were interviewed maintained that boys experienced specific difficulties with academic work¹. For example, they were reported as lacking interest in particular subject areas (such as languages) and styles of work (namely, coursework). Further, they were less likely to achieve *academic success* because staff felt they lacked clear future aspirations, for example, in relation to college and A-level choice or, in relation to specific career intentions. They were more preoccupied, it was alleged, with seeking immediate gratification rather than being able to focus on long term goals:

"(...) for boys the focus is more in and out - as soon as the lesson is over they wanna go play football or video games. Girls will study. Boys tend to leave everything to the last minute and then panic (...)" Mr Brown (teacher)

"(...) girls tend to be more motivated because they are more mature, they mature much earlier than do boys. When boys are playing their boys' games and their boys' toys, girls are thinking career, aren't they for the most part." Mrs Hempscott (SMT)

Boys are also thought to be less likely to achieve academic success because of biological differences between the genders. Staff G explained:

"Oh it's [academic success] easier for girls 'cos boys are just mad. Boys are mad! I was mad, I still am! It's testosterone. It's been...it's all proven scientifically, you know. I mean it's been in the news lately, this year or something: 'yes it's all that testosterone kicking in.' It does your brain in dude! So boys have to be treated differently. People don't know how to treat boys."

While the above quotations (Mr Brown and Mrs Hempscott) and other staff comments allude to intrinsic gender differences, this extract from Staff G was the most extreme. The serious restrictive consequences of testosterone are seen as something of which his colleagues are often ignorant.² Interestingly, the male pupils with whom I spoke later identify Staff G as the member of staff with whom they found it most difficult to get on, demonstrating I would suggest an insight into the way in which personal views and biases can interfere with establishing positive interpersonal relationships.

Five members of staff felt that academic success remained unattractive to boys because boys were more concerned with maintaining a detached coolness as part of their "street credibility" which, it was alleged, boys regarded as dichotomous with achieving academically:

¹ One member of staff presented this as the perspective of wider society and queried the frequent portrayal of boys' failure in the media rather than girls' success.

² Staff G's language and style of communication here made me query the seriousness of his comment although he provided several examples to corroborate this view which due to their detail and content I do not repeat here to protect his anonymity.

"I think one of the main problems with boys at the moment is the sort of laddish cult to be seen as sort of a... someone who is going to attain academic success as being a nerd almost. I would hate to think that was the case sort of nationwide generally but there seems to be at GCSE level, the girls are getting better ratings aren't they than the boys... [the aim] with the sort of boys [is] to get the look, to have a sort of street cred about them. Academic success doesn't fit into that, it isn't part of the scenario." Ms Bellingham (Support staff)

To suggest that boys' failure is a "laddish cult" is to flippantly situate it as a trend or passing fad but also as one in which boys are consciously complicit. It also oversimplifies the complexities and nuances of the achievement debate by ignoring the role of differences by social class and ethnicity (see Literature Review; Gillborn & Mirza, 2000). Relevant to this research is the way that the problem of "street cred" to which Ms Bellingham refers was largely viewed to be a problem for Black boys.

Black boys

Street culture referred to a particular lifestyle, usually established outside of school that involved being part of a group of friends and was characterised by the display of a forthright demeanour, particular forms of dress³, and an interest in hip-hop and fighting. An interest in street culture was regarded as at odds with a commitment to academic success. This was the general staff perception. Since Black boys were seen as having a keen interest in street culture they were therefore seen as less likely to achieve academically:

"Well, I still think there's this thing with the kids, unfortunately, you know about not being a boffin, there's still that ethos there... It's about, it's more about street cred than, you know, how you're doing in your lessons but then I think that's the media as well 'cos you get all these programmes, you know, when you have these programmes with the kids, you know in a school situation it's always the boffin that is... that people take the mickey out of, and I think that has spread. But there is too much... especially with the Black kids there's too much street culture that is more prevalent, that's more important to them... with some of the kids than getting on and doing their best in school." Ms Taylor (teacher)

Black pupils are portrayed here as having their priorities wrong. It is not possible to both retain an interest in "street culture" and to make progress at school. The effects of this street culture are seen as too powerful and, simultaneously rid Black pupils of any autonomy or agency. Street culture was also characterised by a desire to please peers, which itself was indicative of the effects of peer pressure and of the need to maintain street credibility. Staff reported that the desire to impress peers frequently manifested itself through open displays of defiance directed at staff:

³ Chapter 6 looks at the role of dress and demeanour in further detail.

"A lot of the kids here find it very very hard to accept an authority figure and want to challenge it which is something that I think a lot of teachers deal brilliantly with, erm, and that is a real big issue at this school, as is I think the issue for Black boys of...I have seen a lot of them want to impress their peers by being trouble makers, and by being hard when in reality a lot of them are very very clever boys. They come here secretly and they do work with me that no-one else knows about. So that's the kind of thing we're dealing with where sometimes it's not cool to be clever but they wanna be anyway." Ms Sinclair (Support staff)

Ms Sinclair's account can be distinguished from Ms Taylor's because she, while recognising some of the problems presented by Black boys, does not entirely dismiss their capability to do well. Significantly, Ms Sinclair was the only member of staff, interviewed or observed during the course of the fieldwork, to explicitly talk about Black boys in a positive way. Her apparent openness may be due to the more individual, personal relationships that she is able to establish with pupils as a member of the support team compared with, for example, Ms Taylor's status as a classroom teacher:

"The boys are influenced by peer pressure much more than the girls definitely, you know, when I had the Year 11s last year, the amount of discipline problems were with the boys. There were a couple of girls but it was mainly the boys and it's not just Afro-Caribbean boys it's white boys as well... It's not just the Black boys who are getting themselves in trouble but it is the boys who are more influenced." Ms Taylor (teacher)

Ms Taylor's observation regarding a gender difference in discipline is reflected by national data⁴ on permanent exclusions from schools⁵. However, while she concedes that white boys at Metropolitan High are also "getting themselves in trouble" it is Black pupils who are most disadvantaged. This is demonstrated in the school data on pupil exclusions which shows that twice as many Black pupils, at 17%, received exclusions for the academic year 1998 to 1999 compared to just 8% of their white counterparts. As I explained in the Literature Review, exclusions from school whether on a temporary or permanent basis have long term negative consequences on learning and subsequent life chances (see for example Social Exclusion Unit, 1999; Pomeroy, 2000).

I will later argue that it is not simply bad behaviour that causes Black boys to get into trouble with staff. Judgements about Black boys' physical size, demeanour and dress as threatening and undesirable tended to highlight their visibility and opportunity for conflict with staff.

⁴ In 2003/2004, the most recent year for which data is available, boys accounted for 81% of permanent exclusions from maintained schools. Twice as many Black boys were excluded from school as white boys despite their comparably low number in the school population, although this rate was up to three times for Black Caribbean boys (DfES, 2005b). Information on the gender of excluded pupils was not available for Metropolitan High School.

⁵ National data is not currently collected on fixed term or informal exclusions (that is where a pupil has been asked to leave the classroom for a period of time).

Relationships with staff

Compared with observations about the role of gender in academic success, the nature of teacher-pupil relationships was mentioned by just four members of staff yet I suggest that these comments have a particular relevance to understanding how some students may not succeed academically.

In Chapter 4, I mentioned that willingness to engage in discussion and being articulate was regarded by some Met. staff as a characteristic of the academically successful pupil. In turn, these qualities were felt to reflect maturity and confidence:

"Er, one of the things that does stand out [with successful students] is their attitude towards the teacher. They seem a lot more mature the successful ones. They feel much more comfortable with the teachers. The way they talk to them it is far more grown up, far more responsible, it's hard to describe. For example, they talk about things in a more grown up manner and they'll have expanded conversation with the teacher rather than just what might be expected in the classroom. It will be developed more with the more successful student." Ms Sinclair (Support staff)

This comment indicates that merely fulfilling what is expected within the teaching and learning context of the classroom is not enough for a pupil to be constructed as academically successful since to be perceived as such essentially means *going beyond* classroom parameters around expectations of work and teacher interaction. However, it is unclear whether all pupils (and their parents) are aware of this extra requirement and indeed exactly how they might become privy to it. For example, the positive emphasis and value placed on articulate thought and debate is not listed as one of the aims in the school prospectus. Further, there may be a range of factors, about which staff are unaware, that may limit the extent of pupil engagement in conversation and their willingness to initiate or maintain close relationships with staff (see for example Samuel Owusu, Chapter 6). Not displaying these desired behaviours leaves pupils subject to other, sometimes unhelpful perceptions:

"[Academically successful pupils] probably would be more interested when you are talking. They would be more vocal. They will be more willing and able to express whether, er, their concerns and grievances and comment on whatever you ask them. The others would be maybe more shy, withdrawn or you will get one sentence er, I mean, in general." Mrs Fitzpatrick (teacher)

"(...) they [academically successful students] might...they participate and interact more with the teacher, more at the teacher's level in a sense, in a more mature way. So for example, if they are asked a question they won't just answer 'yes' or 'no' or whatever the one word answer is or the sentence. They'll actually try to go a bit further into it maybe giving you examples for example or maybe quoting you something that they've heard, giving those kind of answers and *maybe interacting with the teacher on a better level than those who just try to get the answer right and that's that*. So they feel a bit more

involved and there is actually a bit more of a relationship between the teacher and the student. Because *I have seen academically successful students not doing well in some lessons because there doesn't seem to be that interaction between the teacher and student, if that makes sense and consequently that teacher doesn't see them as academically successful as another teacher would depending on the interaction with that student and how they get on.*" Ms Sinclair (Support staff) [emphasis added]

The significance of Ms Sinclair's comments rests on the amount of value placed on the interaction between teacher and pupil. As I explained above, merely providing the correct answer, being good at work does not ensure being perceived as successful. The pupil needs to constantly make this academic success explicit by, for example, maintaining interaction with staff. This is seen as so important that where these overt displays are absent, the pupil is less likely to be construed by staff as academically successful, affect how they are subsequently treated with, according to Ms Sinclair, possible repercussions on their academic performance. This exposes the importance of staff perception and expectations in influencing the academic attainment of pupils.

Key to academic success

When asked how academic success can be encouraged amongst some pupils, the responses tended to focus on two areas: the need for pupils and their families to value education and for parents to participate in the education of their child. After examining these issues below, I then provide evidence that shows that staff situated certain families as more likely to contribute to the educational failure of their children compared with others.

Valuing Education

Valuing education within the family was cited by a quarter of the interviewed members of staff to be one of the crucial requirements for stimulating academic success. The parents of less successful pupils were those, staff purported, who did not value education and the various opportunities that it was felt to offer:

"I think there's lots of barriers in the way [which means that certain pupils will be less successful]. I think we've had very bright students here, who have still got a thing about parents not always supportive of their education. At the end of the day they are quite happy for their child to come out and do what they've done, you know, to leave school at sixteen. So, I think that there's still a bit of that going out to work at sixteen still applies in schools like this." Ms Buckley (Head of subject area)

A theme that resonates throughout this thesis is the way in which staff offer simplistic causal explanations in relation to the issues around academic success and failure. In the above remark, leaving school at sixteen is seen as indicative of lack of parental support rather than, for example, reflective of long-term discontent with the methods of the education system. The

problem for failure is located within and limited the pupil's family. Diverse explanations are not considered. Other members of staff felt that the problem was not that the parents of less successful pupils did value education but, that they did not know how to affect their concern appropriately:

"Parents, ninety per cent of them are willing 'cos they want their children to succeed, but they are not always sure how to enable that..." Ms Nicholson (Support staff)

"I think in a school like this you have a majority of...a number of parents with different values. I would say practically one hundred percent of the parents...all the parents here recognise and acknowledge the importance of valuing education. You've got a group of parents who see that but don't know how to support their child's education; you've got a group of parents who would see that solely as the school's responsibility: 'that's what I send my child to school for, that's for you to do'; you've got a series of parents who are unrealistic about their child's potential and therefore what they will achieve and, you've got your very pushy parents who will be up the school for everything, fighting for everything for their child. So, you know, you've got a mixture of parents with all those different views." Ms Edwards (Headteacher)

I want to argue that perceptions about which families valued education were subtly classed. So, for example, I have already demonstrated that staff maintained that pupils from middle class backgrounds were more likely to be academically successful (see Chapter 4, p.56). This, therefore, situates these parents as respecting and exercising appropriately their value of education but by implication portrays negatively families from working class backgrounds. These parents were also accused of passing this lack of appreciation down to their offspring:

"...that's down to home and parenting provision and valuing the importance of education 'cos I think lots of kids have no understanding of the importance of education because it hasn't been passed down to them...you know parents have kept them off school or not been bothered." Ms Bellingham (Support staff)

This sentiment was echoed by Mrs Davidson:

Mrs Davidson (teacher) "...some kids do find it difficult to fit into a classroom setting. They find the structure, the formal structure too much for them and if they have a lot of social problems, which a lot of our kids have, their focus is going to be less."

NR "What kind of social problems?"

Mrs Davidson "Unstable homes, parents who do not see education at the top of their list. They don't particularly...pupils who want to stay at home because it is their birthday. Parents will side with them..."

Parents who were not perceived to value education were often identified by their lack of support for their child's education and for the rules and guidelines of the school, representing a challenge for Met. staff not only as they attempted to communicate with these parents but also in their

interactions with the pupils who were seen to mirror their parents' lack of respect. For some Met. staff, this signified a wider problem of ineffective parenting:

"...it's also parents realising what good parenting is and that's where I feel that some of our children are parenting themselves. You know, a child arrived in school the other day at half past 11. I sent him back home. His mother couldn't understand and said, you know, 'he only got up at half past 10'. She couldn't understand that she has a responsibility as a parent to get up and get her child out to school. Some of the parents are facilitating children who are going to be worse parents than they are. It is a shame but it deepens the challenge for us as a school and for us as teachers." Ms Edwards (Headteacher)

It is clear that parents, like the one described here by Ms Edwards make teaching and learning more challenging for school staff. However, in many cases the wider image of the ineffective parent continues to locate total blame of why some pupils do not achieve well academically solely as the responsibility of the parent and, as I show later, their lifestyle and general behaviour. As becomes evident in the next section on parents' evenings, parents were also subject to the same hidden criteria of assessment and judgement as their children.

Parents' Evenings

The subject of parent evenings' and attendance was one that arose in response to questions about how less academically successful students might be better supported and was seen as a way in which parents might display their value of education:

"Why are some pupils not as academically successful? As I say parental expectation, home environment, they haven't got somewhere to work, they go home to you know a fish and chip dinner or a television. Er, their parents are not supportive, they don't turn up to various evenings er, you know or they will come up at times of trouble and shout the odds but they won't come up if you want to discuss the work. You know I am generalising it's not, you know, everyone..." Mrs Hempscott (SMT)

Mrs Hempscott's remark is significant here because it reveals the implicit relationship inferred between home environment and achievement. She places non-attendance at "various evenings" as characteristic of these homes and despite conceding that she is generalising, portrays a vivid image of the parents of less academically successful pupils as homogenous, antagonistic and uncooperative. Her repeated use of "they" also conveys a real division between 'them' and 'us', between the aims and objectives of staff compared to those of these particular parents.

"I think sometimes that they turn parenting over to the school that they are responsible for their children as far as they're concerned, I don't know. I look at some of the students' planners to see if they are signed and some are signed and some aren't. Now

that's something that involves just having a book or saying to your child 'Give me your planner, let me look at your homework' and if that basic thing isn't signed, you kind of think, well those are probably the parents who don't go to parents evening. I mean I don't know I haven't been to a parents' evening before I even said that but I even find that some of the basic things that parents should be checking, they don't check and some do, and I make the assumption that if you're checking your child's homework, you're going to turn up to the parents' evenings and if you're not, you don't really care." Ms Hill (Support staff)

By relating unsigned homework planners with lack of attendance at parents' evenings, Ms Hill is ready to negatively pre-empt parental absence as the result of a lack of interest in their child's education. She makes this judgement despite an admission of her own infrequent attendance at these evenings. To some extent parents who evidence either behaviour have already been signed off as disinterested. In fact, the issue of parents' evenings persisted as a platform on which many implicit assessments were made:

"I think that parents need to take more interest in the students in that yeah coming to parents' evening, coming to different events, especially parents' evening. They need to show that interest, they are not just coming down to, because their child is in trouble coming down and shouting the odds. They [have] got to work more with the school and be more positive. I am not saying that teachers are always right, er, in everything they do but parents need to show more that they are working with the school instead of against the school...." Ms Taylor (teacher)

This quotation signals again the need for parental collaboration in their child's education, recommended through involvement in homework and presence at parents' evenings. Yet despite what I have shown as a keen emphasis on attendance to parents evenings, simply attending was not enough to be viewed as taking an interest in their child's education. Consider, for example, the following remark from Staff E:

"You talk to them and you think 'I don't know why I'm wasting my time'. So on parents' evenings I say as little as possible because I know I am wasting my time. I go [*voice lowers, assumes insincere, pacifying tone*] 'yeah, really well done, really well done, yeah that's great. Oh no, they're doing fine.' You know, then you go away. If you wanna say to them 'well really they're not working very hard' they'd say, 'Isn't that your fault?' What was it I had from some parent last year? Er, 'well, actually you're gonna be inspected quite soon and I'm sure there'll be...' what's that buzz word? *Structures*, oh 'structures' - new buzz word - '...and there will be structures to make you do your job properly'. 'Er, 'scuse me but your kid is an arsehole and isn't working! You haven't sussed that?' So I don't bother. I just do not bother 'cos I don't need the stress." Staff E

Staff E's attitude, while extreme, is echoed in sentiment by another teacher. Entering the staff room with a tired sigh, on the afternoon of a parents' evening, she exclaimed: "These parents! Don't they think we have homes to go to!" Both remarks are important in the context of this section not just because they represent alternative perspectives to their colleagues but because they show that parents have to both spend the 'correct' amount of time with staff and ask the

'right' questions in order for their attendance to be viewed positively. Staff E's admission of lying to parents, in order to make parents' evenings more bearable, is especially concerning in light of substantial research that has demonstrated that despite persistent questions about their child's academic performance parents, especially Black parents', are frequently dismissed or appeased for being over-concerned in their child's education with the severity of any problem revealed only when it is too late (e.g. Cork, 2005: 90).

Family Background

In the previous chapter, I showed that staff at Met. associated certain types of families and home environments with academic success. I now explore some of the ways in which they also made similar attributions regarding academic failure and as such examine their views on families from working class backgrounds, lone parentage and ethnicity.

Social Class

Explicit references to working or lower class families were rare⁶. Staff instead employed a wide range of descriptors and adjectives as euphemisms for poverty or working class background. For example, Mr Condon drew on housing tenure:

"Its going to be socio economic isn't it [that identifies less successful students] ... lower socioeconomic echelons, whatever the descriptors are. You will be able to find them. They'll be living probably in rented accommodation..." Mr Condon (teacher)

While low income and social housing have been shown to be linked (DTLR, 2001) and social class plays a role in school achievement, Mr Condon's reading of the evidence is messy, suggesting that living in rented accommodation directly affects school performance. However, in terms of the current research it does help to provide detail to the picture of *who* is seen as likely to fail. Mrs Hempscott adds to this image:

"There is a growing middle class... Parents who are more educated have higher expectations of what they want their children to achieve and are prepared to support them in that and use their finance in the right way: buy them books, give them tuition, rather than spend it down the pub or whatever..." Mrs Hempscott (SMT)

The contrast between the well-meaning, careful middle class family and the implicitly referenced working class family who squander their money on frivolities is evocative. By being more concerned with drinking rather than investing their money, Mrs Hempscott does not simply sell an image of parents who do not care, but of those who choose their immediate gratification over

⁶ There were two explicit mentions of working or lower class groups.

the long-term investment of their child's future. The issue of parental finances and its affect on schooling was also raised by Mr Foster:

"Hmmm, well it could be sometimes you will get a parent, whether it is one parent or two parents, they are working. They have to work. They are working every hour that God sends to sort of make ends meet. That means that they are doing the very best that they can but it also means that sometimes their kids go home and there is no one at home. All these sort of social things, you know, they are not getting the nutrition they need, they are not getting the sleep they need, you know all that sort of stuff. It could be that they are on very low income and there is a relationship between low income and achievement [*pause*] so they say. I come from a very low income family and I achieved actually very well, so I would say it all depends on the individual. There is a lot more to do with it than just income." Mr Foster (SMT, Gifted & Talented Co-ordinator)

In this case poverty means absent parents and a subsequent effect on adequate child care. However, Mr Foster draws on his own background as a means of questioning the validity of the association between social class and achievement. This 'use of self' was also observed with Ms Buckley and Mrs Simmons in the context of ability in Chapter 4. By including themselves in the context of what they are describing, staff seek to give credibility to their statements though the fact that the reference is to just an individual and hence individual circumstance is overlooked. By using himself as an example and stating that "it all depends on the individual" also challenges the idea of (social) group differences and places the problem of achievement with the pupil.

There were further reported difficulties for those parents who were obliged to work long hours (see Mr Sanderson, below):

"It's very hard for parents to admit that they need the money, that they need to work all the time to feed their kids and it's very hard for them to say, 'yeah, I'm leaving my kid to look after my other kids' and its' no shame on them they are doing their very best...." Ms Sinclair (Support staff)

"If you're not as well off you could be working all hours to try to keep the family going, you have got more stress as well, perhaps you're less patient with your kids sometimes if you're in that sort of environment." Mr Sanderson (teacher)

While staff revealed some understanding of the restrictions that having limited financial resources imposed on families, the ways in which they directly linked this to impoverished living conditions and hence low educational achievement was often uncritical and based on broad generalisations that automatically depressed the opportunities for achievement for pupils from these backgrounds.

Family composition

Two members of interviewed staff also felt that family composition also played a fundamental role in affecting academic success. While this is not a large number of staff, I report their comments because of the way in which they fit into the wider discourse about home environment and its impact, in this case negative, on attainment. In the following remark, Mrs Hempscott is describing the disadvantages of coming from a lone parent home:

"Also there is a culture that they [pupils] can get what they want without having to go through the education system...They see people in the best trainers, a television in every room in the house, anything they want they have. You get a guilt often, particularly a number...a huge number of our students come from single parent homes where the mother obviously tries to overcompensate for the lack of male role model and the child gets everything they want..." Mrs Hempscott (SMT)

Mrs Hempscott's portrayal of the single mother contributes to a gendered pathology of the lone parent family as dysfunctional and unable to cope with childrearing. A direction connection is made between the alleged ineffectiveness of the single mother and the subsequent educational failure of their children and since "a huge number" of Met. pupils come from such homes, it would seem that their educational failure is guaranteed. I also speculate that her interpretation is classed since it is less likely that she would extend the same bias to wealthy single parents or, those who – drawing on the data from Chapter 4 – are able to provide the resources and calm, spacious home environment seen to facilitate academic success. "Single parent homes" were also characterised by disorder and chaos:

"I mean obviously if you've got a stable home life, two parents, you got your own bedroom with a computer in it, you know you're obviously find it easier than if you're from a single parent family, you got 2 or 3 younger brothers or sisters to look after and you're helping mum cook tea. You know the two type of students are gonna be very very different when it comes to actual learning." Mr Brown (teacher)

"A lot of people have got so much going on in their lives; they can't cope with their kids. A lot of the children are sort of left to look after younger brothers and sisters, they've got no time to do their schoolwork (...)" Ms Sinclair (Support staff)

Like his colleague Mrs Hempscott, Mr Brown states his perspective as being "obvious", as based on commonsense and fact, leaving little room for his position to be contested. The mention of the number of children (see also Ms Sinclair) and their dependency, conveyed through reference to their youth, further portrays the working class family as sexually preoccupied, disorganised and unable to provide necessary support for and focus on their secondary school-aged child.

Ethnicity

As with discussion about working class families, explicit reference to ethnicity and educational failure was rare being mentioned by just two of the twenty two members of staff interviewed. However, there were numerous coded references to ethnicity in remarks about dress and various forms of undesirable behaviour which supports the findings of other ethnographic research (e.g. Connolly, 1998: 93, 94 but also see Apple, 1999; see Chapter 6 for detailed discussion of this area). Parents not likely to value the importance of education were seen to be those from specific ethnic backgrounds:

“...Travellers traditionally don’t care much about school. It’s...the education way is not a good thing. In fact, some of them actively pull their kids away from education ‘cos they want them to follow traditional manual labour.” Mr Bailey (teacher)

Mr Bailey’s perspective may reflect reality for some Traveller families, however, there are a host of reasons that he does not address, why those from these communities do not appear to “care much about school”. The handbook *Complementing Teachers: A practical guide to promoting race equality in schools* suggests that creating stereotypes in this way, including positive ones may not be helpful to understanding more about the cultures of Traveller groups (or indeed any ethnic group). Amongst the points for consideration, it is proposed that teachers might wish to consider that some parents are unfamiliar with the education system and therefore might be less likely to acknowledge and show concern about achievement. The implication is that schools look inwards to their current provision in order to examine in which ways such families might be better included (The Runnymede Trust, 2003: 158).

This apparent readiness to situate the family as deficient, as the obvious cause of their children’s lack of academic progress or success is evident in the following interview extract from Ms Buckley. She has just finished explaining that the reason some children do not succeed at school is because their families do not recognise the value of continuing education:

- | | |
|------------|--|
| NR | “Right. Do you think that applies to certain types of children or ...?” |
| Ms Buckley | “I think it is certain backgrounds, I don’t think there is one stereotypical background but there’s certainly families where they want to send their child out to work. I would say it is becoming less and less, more people are sitting their degree but I would say that there is also that thing that, erm, there isn’t a university culture as such; it’s building up. There isn’t this thing that ‘oh you know my brother and sister have gone to university, so I’m going to go too’. That’s very limited in a school like this. I still see quite a few people, when I work in the 6th form, on their UCAS form they’d actually put ‘if I go to university, I’d be the first one from my family to go to university’. So it’s not the norm.” |

- NR "Hmmm. I wonder why that is?"
- Ms Buckley "It is background. We have a high...the ethnic mix at Met. is part of the thing 'cos we've got a number of people who have come over to the country...they're probably first generation still. We have, I just, I don't really know. I was brought up round here and I was probably the first person from my year to go to university, no-one else went from my year. Yeah, so it's background, I think financial background in some cases."
- NR "You said, 'first generation'."
- Ms Buckley "I think yeah because we've got some people, er, I think they might be the first generation to be born over here. We've also got people who've come over here recently, so we've have refugees, people from Eastern Europe and Somalia, varying places where people have recently come over. We've got people who are learning English as a second language and of course that's a barrier in itself. I don't think in their background in their family history, in maybe the schooling still, it is seen as the norm that they ought to go to university..."

Like Mr Bailey, Ms Buckley does not critique her views⁷. She does not consider whether, for example, university offers everyone the same options for success and despite conceding that financial stability may impact on university attendance the family is, nevertheless, regarded as deficient. As before (see Chapter 4, p.58), she uses her own circumstances as a means of attempting to validate and neutralise her content. Yet, when prompted she is able to give examples of "stereotypical backgrounds" that do not wish to attend further and higher education and identifies particular ethnic group as problematic. Neither Ms Buckley nor Mr Bailey take account of the experiences and backgrounds of the ethnic groups that they mention and the ways in which their very perceptions might affect successful pupil inclusion (for example, through their interaction with parents) and continuation to post-compulsory education nor do they examine the ways in which they and the institution in which they teach might be improved to support these pupils they identify as likely to have problems achieving (The Runnymede Trust, 2003:153).

In considering how staff at Metropolitan High understand academic failure, I have shown that they feel that some pupils are more likely to fail than others. The probability of failure for some Met. staff was seen to be shaped by the ethnicity, family composition and attitude of the pupil. I argue that these associations often draw on a discourse of commonsense and that backed up with an unfaltering faith in the validity and reliability of statutory tests makes the possibility of academic success for many pupils a real challenge.

⁷ For example, I am curious how her position may have changed had I shared with her that I am, according to societal definitions and not my own, "first generation" of Barbadian parents and, reminded her that I was in the middle of collecting data for my doctorate.

Pupils

"It's nothing about their gender or anything like that. It's not about; it's no [sic] disability, nothing. It's not about who you are on the outside it's about who you are on the inside..."

Simon Daniels (Year 11, Mixed heritage)

Overall, the pupils interviewed for this research did not give detailed responses to the questions about less academically successful students. This may be because, as successful students, they were unable to relate to less successful peers or because they found the nature of the questions irrelevant to the way in which they conceptualised success and failure. Either or both of these interpretations may be true and it is worth bearing their academic status in mind when reading this section.

I start by examining characteristics of less successful students before presenting pupils' recommendations for their improved attainment.

Characteristics of less academically successful students

According to the pupil evidence presented in the previous chapter, academic failure might be defined as not achieving five or more A* to C grades at GCSE. It might also be argued that less successful students are unlikely to have clear objectives for future education or employment and if they do, do not often demonstrate a clear understanding of the processes required to reach their goals. Such students might lack motivation, not work hard nor engage constructively in classroom activity. In terms of appearance, one of the stereotypes of an unsuccessful pupil was someone who cared little for their attire, perhaps looking dishevelled, someone who flouted school uniform guidelines and, as a result received frequent reprimands from staff.

"The majority of those who tend not to be academically successful are usually troublemakers, or very rude or don't even go to lessons, stuff like that. So like they walk around in gangs, stuff like that...The ones who talk, walk and get excluded or suspended. The ones who usually walk around in gangs; the ones who push in line; the ones who bully; the ones who don't really work in lessons; who back chat to teachers; the ones who don't even go to lessons; the ones that misbehave. The ones that take the mickey out of others, other pupils and then behind the teachers back they do that as well." Curtis Mayers (Year 10, Black British)

The group of pupils that Curtis has identified as not being academically successful are pupils who make life difficult not just for staff but for their peers. It is likely that Curtis has identified lack of academic success with bad behaviour since it seems unlikely that pupils can be categorised neatly as either A* to C grade candidates and the type that he describes here. I suggest, therefore, that he has identified an extreme, visible, disruptive group and that there are pupils in

between are those may display varying degrees of appropriate academic and interpersonal behaviour (see next quote by Curtis).

Students who were less likely to be academically successful were also thought to be loud and disruptive in the classroom.

"They...the like noisy ones...always making noise. You can tell by...I think you can tell by the way that they are sitting, their manner. Like they're all slouching and like they don't really care about the work they're doing, that they should be doing." Nathan Johnson (Year 11, Black Caribbean)

Nathan's observation about the supposed demeanour of less successful students is a noteworthy one since he sat in the same way during his interview. I examine this and my response in some detail in the next chapter. Despite proffering these guidelines for identifying their less successful peers, these students conceded that there could be a range of reasons for their lack of academic success:

"It might be that the work's too hard and they don't understand it and they'd rather do something else than to get to understand the work."

Nadine Taylor (Year 10, Black Caribbean)

"There are those that just...they might not be called academically successful students but they are in between both groups so that it's not that they are in gangs or they are academically successful, it's just that they find the work that is given to them difficult so they work at a certain pace and everything." Curtis Mayers (Year 10, Black British)

While these two academically successful students accounted for the possibility that peers might respond differently when presented with difficult work, there was also some acknowledgement that the propensity for academic success might go unnoticed:

Natasha (Year 11, Black African Caribbean) "If you're not so clever, a lot of people in my class are but they don't show it, I don't know why they don't. But yet like they...I don't know [are] academically successful and bringing in more their personal side I guess like they have good ideas, they can hold good conversations, serious conversations. They don't usually bring that side of them out."

NR "The side of them that can have a good conversation?"

Natasha "Yeah, or can treat a private or personal situation seriously and can handle something. Does that make sense?"

NR "I want you to tell me a bit more."

Natasha "Like suppose someone has personal issues or they have experience in personal issues they understand. Like okay, there's [sic] people in our class like suppose, I suppose if you think about it [are] academically

successful. We have put ourselves into categories in our class: the ones who you know or teachers we've had have shown that they are successful because of the way they ask them to read in class and there are ones *who don't want to read in class so they are put in the non successful class and the ones who don't want to answer the questions in class are seen as the non successful ones*. But those that are quiet or those who mess about a bit but have serious sides to them and they can handle intelligent stuff or they come out with things and it's like we've been together five years and we get shocked by things they say: 'I didn't know you were actually clever. All this time I thought you didn't know much', but they did." [emphasis added]

Natasha outlines some of quite serious consequences (for example being moved down into lower ability groups) of not playing out the full part of the academically successful pupil in the ways that are generally recognised and valued by both peers and teachers. Space and time restrictions meant that it was not possible to question Natasha at length about why she felt these academically successful students did not want to read. However, it is worth noting that these covertly successful pupils did not "want" to read *not* that they were not able. Yet it is this very lack of engagement, according to Natasha and supporting Ms Sinclair's earlier remarks about the importance of advertising one's academically successful status (see above) that sees these pupils being reconstituted and treated as not successful. Her own admission of being "shocked", exposes the extent to which there are identifiable behaviours pertinent to the successful pupil and, as Samuel corroborates below, to less successful pupils.

"There's this boy...there's this boy who is quite smart. He could get ten A to Cs or five A to Cs but he's too much of a...he plays too much computer games, goes out every day, just he has fun and all that. He doesn't put enough time into his studies. He has a short attention span, so he can't just...he doesn't like being bored, he has to be like the centre of attraction. And that's just how the teachers got sick of it and that just held him back."

Samuel Owusu (Year 11, Black African)

Addressing academic failure

From the responses given here, it seems that academically successful pupils' generally regarded lack of academic success to be located in a failure to work hard or a disinterest in school work. Solutions to address this failure therefore lay in practical strategies for improving pupil learning skills which in the excerpts below also included parental support⁸:

and
for
" [You should] get his parents up [to the school and] talk to them, have a little meeting try to sort things out like. Give him more work to do, to take home and make him stay after school sessions." Nathan Johnson (Year 11, Black Caribbean)

"You just have to find out why they were like that in the first place and you could help

⁸ Chapter 8 considers pupil recommendations for the ways in which achievement might be improved through changes in teacher attitude and teaching styles.

their problem. You could ask them what subjects they like and dislike and why don't they don't like it, if they don't understand it or something 'cos most students bunk lessons because they don't like the lesson, they don't understand it, they just don't go to them. Maybe, erm, find out if their parents help them with their work, you know, revision books or something." Nadine Taylor (Year 10, Black Caribbean)

A further strategy for increasing academic success involved simply talking with less successful students to help them understand the importance of education and the ways in which it might contribute to the fulfilment of future aspirations:

"They have to realise that they're not coming to school for long and that you need money to buy something and to have money you have to get a job and to have a job you need qualifications and to get qualifications you have to go to school."

Natalie Davidson (Year 10, Black British)

"Give them a talking to, tell them how important school is to them and they should not throw it away..." Nathan Johnson (Year 11, Black Caribbean)

It was also felt that negative influence from peers distracted some pupils from focusing and succeeding academically and hence their recommendation for promoting success lay in discouraging association with these groups:

"To make them academically successful and they're not? (...) Well I would talk to them personally 'cos somebody could be smart but because of the way they act people don't tend to know they're smart and there could be a problem behind why they are acting the way they do. So, I would prefer to talk to them on a one to one level and like talk to them and see who they are as a person to improve how they are, 'cos they could want to be smart but because they're in a group or a gang and it's not so easy to get out of, they can't (...)" Michelle Cobham (Year 10, Black Caribbean)

"Like some people can get distracted very easily and that will like interfere with your work and you'll stop working and you'll laugh with the person, you'll chat with the person. It means you could be successful but you just gonna have to learn not to be distracted by them people." Danielle McCalla (Year 10, Black Caribbean)

I have shown that students' recommendations to encourage success in less academically successful peers appeared to be targeted very much at an individual level. In other words, their suggestions focused on understanding the needs of particular students and why it was that they might not be succeeding. Some pupils might be easily distracted, others might not have a clear idea of the ways in which education and particular courses might help them in the long term and strategies for reducing failure were focused on addressing these specific issues.

Discussion

I have clearly shown that pupils' views about academic failure differed significantly from staff views. These academically successful students were likely to regard failure as an individual problem possibly arising from an avoidance of difficult work, from being easily distracted or simply not presenting in an academically successful way compared to the focus on the family that preoccupied teacher accounts. While these differing positions may reflect the feasibly smaller worldview of the students, their perceptions of academic failure and how it might be addressed represents an arguably more fluid and equitable stance than the academic failure as family pathology view advanced by the very staff that teach them. For these pupils *anyone* can fail just as *anyone* can succeed.

Staff definitions of and thoughts about academic failure seemed to be based on misinterpreted or tabloidesque research evidence that had been robbed of many of its complexities shown, for example, by Mr Condon's remark that less successful pupils were probably to be found living in rented accommodation. I also believe that the model of the deficient family with its lone or single parent mother is in fact a coded discourse about the wider Black (especially Black Caribbean) community, and incompetent single Black mothers⁹. With such staff perceptions they and their children are already set up to fail.

One of the most intriguing but also concerning findings in this chapter centres on the importance placed on the appropriate performance of academic success from both parents and their pupils. I showed, for example, how mere attendance at parents' evenings was not enough to be regarded as having legitimate interest in your child's education just as becoming established as a legitimate academically successful pupil means actively performing elements of that success in the classroom. Pupils who do not play the game are removed.

Staff accounts of failure rarely questioned the difficulty of or pupils' understanding of the work they had been set and yet successful students indicated that this might be an area for further investigation (see also their comments in Chapter 8).

The evidence in this and the previous chapter alone begins to unravel some of the complexities tied up in becoming academically successful and how it extends beyond the accurate completion of classroom work and even, as I now show, to the ways some pupils dress and their pastimes.

⁹ Census data does indicate that just over half of Black Caribbeans are in lone parent households compared to 22% of the white population (White, 2002). It is the judgement of failure that has been attached to this that I am questioning.

Chapter 6 Dress and Demeanour

There were no explicit questions in the interview schedule about dress or behaviour. It was a subject that stemmed mainly from female members of staff and a few pupils, while they explained how academically successful students might be identified. This process of identification involved frequent reference to school uniform guidelines and some of the ways in which pupils were encouraged to adhere to these regulations during the school day.

The chapter begins by describing Met.'s uniform requirements as listed in the school prospectus, which was handed out to all new and prospective parents, therefore, providing some indication of acceptable and unacceptable parameters of dress. I then consider how the school ensured acquiescence with these rules, before proceeding to examine staff and pupil perceptions of dress and general conduct.

School guidelines on uniform and behaviour.

All students in Years 7 to 11 at Metropolitan High are expected to wear the full school uniform¹ as described in detail in school prospectus. Wearing the correct uniform also is also listed as part of the Metropolitan High School Code of Conduct, details of which can be found on the same page.

Girls are expected to wear a black skirt of a "sensible length" or black tailored trousers with a white shirt-style blouse, buttoned to the neck and with a normal collar. The school tie has to be worn to the conventional length². The school jumper could be worn with the appropriate blazer but sweatshirts are not allowed. Black, "sensible" shoes are advised and trainers³ forbidden.

Similar guidelines apply for the boys with them having to wear black trousers. Jeans nor corduroy trousers are acceptable. Neither boys nor girls are allowed to wear caps, hats or scarves in the school building and finally, personal stereos and mobile telephones are not permitted in the school.

¹ References to uniform colour and detailed descriptions of the clothing, other than those relevant to the current research, are avoided to retain the school's anonymity.

² Which I learnt from a student that this meant that at least 4 stripes had to be visible, although this is not specified in the prospectus.

³ The emphasis on this particular rule being made clear from its repetition in at least three places in the list of requirements.

As these guidelines form part of the school rules it was expected that pupils would abide to them. However, much of the language in the prospectus is open to individual interpretation and judgement so that words such as “sensible”, for example, represent a different display of uniform from one pupil to another, yet alone between teacher and pupil. I suggest that the vagueness of the guidelines places a responsibility on pupils, once they enter the space of the school, to learn the real interpretation or operational version of these rules.

Staff

“This is not New York, we’re not LA. This isn’t the ghetto. It’s a school.”
Ms Edwards (headteacher, Black female)

This section begins by studying how uniform guidelines and behavioural norms were implemented at Met., before examining how staff identify successful pupils based on their appearance. Their responses are grouped under four broad headings which relate to: those who reject the notion of an association between appearance and academic success; those who make an indirect link; those who explicitly link appearance and academic success; and, finally, the rare more complex position posited by one member of Met. support staff.

Implementation of school uniform guidelines and appropriate behaviour

From general observations⁴ of teacher-pupil interaction throughout the school, and from conversations with interviewed staff, it was apparent that mainly teachers, as opposed to support staff, sought to encourage compliance with school uniform rules.

For example, I observed two teachers use the end of a higher school assembly, while pupils silently filed out row by row, as an opportunity to inspect uniform and instruct that ties and skirts be lengthened and shirts tucked in. Instructions were issued in two word commands such as “Shirt, Marcus!” and the identified pupil reacted by tucking in his shirt without any outward sign of willingness or enthusiasm. At least two thirds of the reprimands related to tie length which most students tended to wear well below the four-stripe minimum. These interactions indicated that both parties knew the acceptable forms of dress but these were not apparent to me as an observer nor, as I have mentioned were they made explicit in school correspondence. Learning these rules is clearly important to negotiating school well.

Assembly also provided an opportunity for teachers to moderate unwanted behaviour. In one assembly, pupils sat in a lecture room format, on ascending steps while their teachers stood at ground level facing them. A senior member of management read out notices and a reading for

⁴ Recorded at the time in fieldwork notebook.

the day from a position in the centre of the hall in a process that took approximately fifteen minutes. Despite this it was the presence of the teachers that seemed most prominent as they used their vantage points to scan the rows and reprimand misbehaving pupils. Even as a researcher I felt as though I was being watched as I sat amongst the pupils and was more aware of the gaze of the teachers than of the words being spoken by the member of senior staff leading the proceedings. Pupils were told off if they were not sitting up properly and sometimes told to move to a different bench altogether if they were caught talking.

This theme of surveillance was witnessed at the start of the school day. The headteacher's office window, positioned 2 to 3 metres from ground level, near one of the entrances to the school grounds served as a vantage point, for her to shout down to pupils in the school grounds, questioning them about the reason for their lateness and demanding that they hasten to their first lesson of the day.

While it was not clear whether uniform monitoring was a concern for all the interviewed or observed teachers, for those for whom it was, a range of approaches were employed. Aside from after assembly, the start of lessons provided another opportunity to implement checks:

"Sometimes at the beginning of lessons...I mean it is a good way of settling students as well...sometimes making sure their ties are straight, shirts are tucked in, they are not wearing trainers, things like that that and sending children home for wearing trainers."

Ms Jones (Support staff, white female)

Such checks at the beginning of lessons may, far from settling students, trigger teacher-pupil conflict and detract from the planned teaching and learning objectives. Despite her comment, Ms Jones was the only member of the twenty-two interviewed staff who explicitly stated that the attention paid to wearing the correct uniform was overly strict.

The method of uniform control employed by Mrs Fitzpatrick involved making comments to male pupils that drew on their respective gender differences and perceived heterosexuality. She would tell them that she liked gentlemen and that she did not like her gentlemen to look scruffy. This, as I witnessed, made them squirm with embarrassment and with their gaze avoiding hers quickly adjust their offending item of clothing as appropriate.

Irrespective of the strategy employed, there was no indication that any of the methods described here were completely effective in preventing students from readjusting their clothing after teachers' backs were turned; students were reprimanded for the way they wore the uniform consistently during the entire three terms I was researched in the school.

No link between appearance and success

Of the four staff in this category, only Mr Bailey (Science, Black male) explained his reasons for not associating academic performance and appearance through the following example:

"I am just thinking of two people who are both academically gifted and both totally different. They are typical of a type of pupil. I've got one lad in my class who is, if you looked at his handwriting it is unbelievable. If you looked at the presentation of his work it is very messy. If you looked at the presentation of himself, he is not very tidy. He is very scrappy, not dirty, just dishevelled and his whole demeanour but he is a genius. He is a genius. He is one of the best scientists I have ever taught in my life (...). I have got another pupil who is the opposite, always immaculate, whose work is immaculate (...) everything is lovely and neat, everything is ordered. And he is gifted (...) How would you know they were both good? You wouldn't even know just by looking at them. How *would* you know? I don't think you *would* know just by looking at them."

What Mr Bailey reflects here is the messiness in identity and the difficulty of making causal inferences from common or stereotypical assumptions about different groups⁵. While the other three staff members did not discuss appearance, they tended to make wider references to other apparent identifiers of success which were discussed at length in Chapter Four.

Indirect interpretations of student subcultures

Two teachers initially reject the notion of a relationship between appearance and success but then proceed to describe forms of dress that they clearly *did not* associate with academic achievement:

"(...) sometimes the biggest scruff could be very...you know, by appearances...it doesn't necessarily go because you see a face or you see a neatly dressed person with a big bag on his or her shoulder er, you know, this could be a success because sometimes, you know, the children of lower ability might look like that. So I think you would have to, er, speak to them." Mrs Fitzpatrick (teacher, white female)

Later, in the same interview, when responding to a question about which pupils were most likely to be popular, she answers:

"The pupils that are most popular or who are looked up to or have an influence over others are the ones who are achievers, who do well academically, who conform to the school rules on uniform. So they don't necessarily wear a hood or big Nike but are also confident, won't be afraid to challenge stupidity and unacceptable behaviour and tell a person why not."

The contrast between the two remarks is striking and very interesting. In the former, she appears to reject any kind of categorisation of appearance and an association with academic performance. It might be argued, for example, that it is not socially acceptable, especially in her

⁵ Although, as I showed in the previous chapter his attitude here seems to contradict his previous views, for example, understanding why some ethnic groups do not do well (see Chapter 5, p.76).

capacity as a teacher, to make such a causal inference. Her latter remark, however, initially seems to contradict this. Her construction of the popular student is of someone who is also a high achiever, confident and not only conformed to school rules on uniform, *but* is likely to reject *specific forms of dress*: “So they don’t necessarily wear a hood or big Nike (...)” [emphasis added]. While I concede that these forms of clothing contravened school uniform guidelines, it is the specificity of the type of clothing in this context and the implied automatic relationship with all that is the antithesis of success, compliance and popularity that requires further interrogation. Mrs Fitzpatrick was not the only staff member to express such opinion as I show later in this chapter.

Her Mathematics colleague, Mr Condon (white male) also begins by denying the feasibility of appearance as an identifier of success but becomes less absolute towards the end of the following comment and after he is prompted:

- | | |
|-----------|---|
| Mr Condon | “Well, yeah, I’m gonna say, let me see - academically successful – I am trying to think of the opposite to that. Yeah, you could find a real clean tidy looking girl but that wouldn’t prove anything and you could see a clean tidy Afro-Caribbean boy and he could be the worse boy in the school [<i>chuckles</i>]. His mom would dress him up nice in the morning but he could be...yeah, I don’t know how you’d tell (...). Well, they wouldn’t be scruffy, they wouldn’t be wearing the whole...they wouldn’t have the whole like, ‘I don’t care thing’...the hat, the whatever.” |
| NR | “What’s the whole ‘I don’t care thing’?” |
| Mr Condon | “Oh, you know, they wouldn’t have a walkman ⁶ on permanently, the... whatever the silly hat is at the time. They would probably look pretty studious but that’s pretty vague.” |

The chosen subjects for Mr Condon’s example are interesting. The “girl” remains without an ethnicity, yet the boy is explicitly “Afro-Caribbean” which represents the heightened visibility of and, as I argue later in this chapter, problematisation of Black male pupils⁷. Mr Condon’s was of the opinion that academically successful students were unlikely to follow fashion trends and tended to subscribe to school rules. Like Mrs Fitzpatrick, he initially refuses to make a direct connection between appearance and success, but *nonetheless* does deem certain clothing as distinguishers of the uncaring, disinterested student. Both sets of comments indicate that while academically successful students might not always dress or present neatly they are unlikely, to

⁶ I have already mentioned that personal stereos are not permitted on school grounds.

⁷ Throughout my time in the school, I was led to believe that there were mainly Black pupils on the roll. Subsequent reading of the Ofsted report, in fact indicated that the number of (total) Black and white pupils was roughly equal and specifically that there were almost three times as many white as Black Caribbean pupils. I suggest that, irrespective of any intervening argument such as perceptions that Black pupils cause more problems, this exposes the heightened visibility of simply being Black at Metropolitan High.

opt into particular (Nike, caps or hooded tops) clothing. I say more on these forms of dress below.

Explicit interpretations

Five members of staff made explicit observations about particular forms of dress or behaviour which they regarded problematic and as contributing to overall failure at school. While the following interview extract is rather long it does provide a useful insight to the types of student subcultures which Ms Hill (Support staff, Black female) rejects and which are shared by some of her female colleagues. The extract begins after she has explained how, as a result of the changes brought about by the headteacher Ms Edwards, there was, in her mind, a real difference in students' attitude and in the overall ethos of the school:

- | | |
|---------|---|
| NR | "How would you describe the ethos of the school?" |
| Ms Hill | "I think it is a very caring school and discipline is very important within the school. And there are certain rules that the head has implemented that, you know, are having to be implemented at all times, like not wearing hats, like having their uniform on properly. Simple things like that, you'd be surprised, have made a difference to their attitude because they've got to be in uniform. It's almost like when they put a hat on it's almost like they are out with their boys and they're not ⁸ ! I'm talking about the boys here [<i>laughs</i>]...their behaviour changes to now when they can't put their hoods up and they can't have their hats on, their behaviour is different." |

Ms Hill refers to the fact that Ms Edwards has implemented specific rules regarding pupils wearing the correct uniform which may account for the vigilance exercised by teachers during assembly that I mentioned at the start of this chapter and, for the following comment from Ms Edwards:

"And I will say to the children 'This is not New York, we're not LA. This isn't the ghetto. It's a school.' I can say that and get away with it because I am a Black headteacher but if a white headteacher said that then yes they would be 'oh stereotypical images' and whatever but the children know why I'm saying that and I'm saying that for their good because if I was a different head yes the boys of this school would, like in some schools, would walk around with their hoods up you know whatever. Not in this school!"

⁸ Staff frequently described pupils' appearance and demeanour as reflective of a wider student subculture or street culture. By this I understood them to be referring to group or collective forms of student behaviour, dress or interests which were perceived as not directly related to the context and values of the school so that they were imbued with a secondary status. Student involvement in these sub or peer cultures was not portrayed as explicit or conscious. The group's influence was seen to be very powerful, reportedly encouraging members to reject any focus on educational achievement within an ethnicised context, which usually related to Black male students.

Pupils are expected to look and act in ways that befitted specific school constituted modes of being. Here Ms Edwards has equated hoods with an American subculture that is unrelated to the desired image and goals of the school both in terms of geographical location and in terms of the perceived dishevelled impoverishment of the "ghetto". Her statement is also laden with overt and implicit references to ethnicity. Ms Edwards' comment is directed at Black students and she uses her own ethnicity to substantiate her argument and to give confirmation of her well-meaning and lack of racist intent. This reflects some of the simplistic ways in which racism and ethnically biased statements are misunderstood as only valid when directed from one ethnic group to another but I will say more on this point later.

To return to Ms Hill, her direct connection between stricter uniform regulation and enforcement and the change in pupil attitude in a manner reveals the significance she places on the role of appearance. To explain this line of reasoning further, it is notable that Ms Edwards had also introduced the concept of rewarding students for academic and extra-curricular participation and progress - recognised through the presentation of certificates at assembly and at yearly achievement evenings - but that this may have also contributed to the positive change in ethos and student attitude was not a matter Ms Hill sees for consideration. She is more willing to relate any problems and hence changes directly to the new uniform regulation. In the quote above, she also describes the particular elements of clothing that she finds unacceptable because she feels it stimulates change in the boys' behaviour: "It's almost like when they put a hat on it's almost like they are out with their boys and they're not!" I asked her to elaborate on this point:

- | | |
|---------|--|
| Ms Hill | "It's almost like they are more or less conforming to school, when they haven't got all that gear on, you know, they're not an individual within a school. When you look at them they are students and ...but when you got your hat on and this on, you're individual and it's individual behaviour and sometimes it can be a bit threatening and, you know, like er...like what's depicted on the TV and about the American sort of influence and stuff. Erm, once they haven't got their Nike on, you know, their anything else on <i>they become more receptive students.</i> " |
| NR | "Hmm, you can feel that, yeah?" |
| Ms Hill | "Yeah, you can feel that! And I think as well within the school it feels less threatening because they are all looking like students should look." |
| NR | "Right." |
| Ms Hill | "It's really strange, you know, when they've got the hat on and everything on it's almost like it's a different thing. The children that you, the students that you see here, even if they're Year 11 and they tower over you, the fact that they've got an uniform on, you can approach them and talk to them. But if you were out, on the street with them with |

their hoods on and everything on, it's a different persona, you wouldn't approach them 'cos you wouldn't know what you would get back with any exchange at all. But within the school, you expect a certain level of something because they have got the uniform on and... you know? I don't know if I'm making any sense." [emphasis added]

"It's almost like they are more or less conforming to school, when they haven't got all that gear on, you know, they're not an individual within a school". This sentence indicates Ms Hill's need to situate pupils as homogenous, as not having individual discernible identities. I would also suggest that this is a comment about power. Retaining a pupil-like persona enables Ms Hill to keep these tall, threatening boys situated as pupils and further returns a comfortable clarity to her relatively powerful role as an adult/teacher and their relatively powerless role as pupils/young people. By displaying elements of individuality, and especially those that she constructs as threatening, evokes feelings of discomfort as the boundaries she understood become shifted. Rogers, (1979) maintains that in fact this is a central tenet of the traditional school system where the teacher is seen to hold the knowledge and the pupil is the recipient of this knowledge with no place for the pupil's self in the classroom. The emphasis is on "the intellect" or power and knowledge (see Literature Review for further discussion).

By manipulating the school uniform, the pupils here are, in some ways challenging the invisibility expected of them and displaying part of their identity. However, it is not simply the rejection of uniform for *different* forms of attire that is seen as challenging. It is the acquisition and display of the hat and the Nike clothing which demonstrate, in her opinion, a cultural reference that is troublesome, uncooperative *and* as I have already said, threatening. As with Ms Edwards there is an ambition for pupils to dress in a way that not only conforms to the guidelines of the prospectus but situates the pupils, in their opinion, as ready to learn, or as demonstrating "desirable learner identities" (Youdell, 2003:15). This is despite the fact that the students themselves may not necessarily changed with the enforcement of stricter uniform control but that it is *Ms Hill's* shift in perception and subsequent reduction of fear, brought about because "they are all looking like students should look", that causes these students to be reconstructed as "receptive".

So far, the threat for members of staff has been the type of clothing and its reported association with a particular subculture and attitude that has been interpreted as challenging. In her ensuing remark (see above), Ms Hill comments on boys who despite being only 15 and 16 years old "tower over you". Their height embodies yet a further element of fear which, coupled with their attire, situates these students as Other, as possessing "a different persona", the strength of which would cause her to avoid them out side of the school gates. The point that needs

emphasising here is that the fear and intimidation that Ms Hill feels is based on the *subjective* interpretation of boys' appearance which has been *unquestioning* constituted as negative. Ms Hill was not alone in her views which were also shared by some of her female colleagues. One of these was Ms Johnson (Support staff, white female) who approached me during the day on which I had introduced myself and the nature of the research⁹ to staff, during the informal briefing held that morning, in the staffroom. After disclosing her interest in the findings of my research, she began to tell me about an external project being carried out locally regarding the high numbers of Black students being excluded from school. My notes read:

"[She says she is] curious as to why this is. Proffers [her own] question regarding culture, parenting/lack of support at home. Also mentioned clothes that sixth formers wear. Some of Black boys image – take it from America ([it is] not British culture). 'You see them with their jackets and those hoods pulled down over their heads and those things [bandanas] around their head. They might be innocent but *you* would cross the road if you saw them.'

The references to America and to certain forms of headwear mirror those expressed by Ms Hill and Ms Edward while the dichotomy she attempts to draw between American and British cultures suggests a fixed, discrete and unsophisticated analysis of (British) identity. By drawing me into her account ("*you* would cross the road") she seeks to collude with me and, in so doing, conveys several messages. She insinuates that, despite sharing the same ethnicity as these boys, despite also being Black, I would attempt to avoid them. By constructing her sentence in this way, she cleverly intimates that her comment is not a crude analysis based on ethnicity alone and this has the added bonus of providing her with a certain protection, as a white member of staff, from accusations of stereotyping and racism. To attempt to follow her line of reasoning and temporarily bracket ethnicity from this equation reveals that we both also have gender in common. Therefore, I too would avoid these boys because, as a woman, I would come to the same conclusion, that these boys are guilty of some as yet unknown crime and are, therefore, genuine objects of a threat which must be avoided. The reality, however, is that Ms Johnson's refers specifically to "Black boys" which reveals her trepidation as located in the interconnectedness of ethnicity and gender: a fear of Black males. Another female teacher echoed Ms Johnson's sentiment¹⁰. In response to the question regarding how academically successful students might be identified, Mrs Wright (Senior Management Team, white female), provided the following response:

⁹ This introduction usefully served as an opportunity for some staff to express their interest in the research, to offer their welcomed though unsolicited views on the issue of academic success, achievement, and Black students in general (I had not mentioned ethnicity in my introduction) or quite simply introduce themselves and engage in general conversation.

¹⁰ Other female teachers, while not alluding to dress and demeanour, did discuss other student subcultures that they felt restrictive to academic success and which were more likely to cause Black students to fail (see Chapter 5 - Academic Failure).

- Mrs Wright "Looking at this school, erm, I think it is more than likely to be the girls who would be ... who perceived themselves as the academics. It's difficult because looking at the current Year 11s and the current Year 10s, there are small groups of fairly academic boys who tend to sit together. They don't really go, it's not so much the boffin culture type thing but to a large extent it will tend to be the girls and they will tend to be very well turned out (...). I wouldn't want to ... I don't think you could stereotype because what you also have is lots of students who look the part, that they work hard, they do this and they do that *but they don't actually quite get it.*"
- NR "Right, so what's 'looking the part'? What's that?"
- Mrs Wright "Well, having the right books; their bags; having the right equipment; probably wearing more or less the right uniform; *not dressing in a challenging way, not appearing to dress challenging.* Having said that sometimes when they reach Year 11, Year 10 or 11, they tend to go their own way with that as far as appearance is concerned: all types of strange looks."
- NR "Okay, like what?"
- Mrs Wright "Well, I don't know if we've got any Goths but it's that type of thing. It's Year 10 or 11 that begins to emerge (...)." [emphasis added]

During this interview, I felt as though Mrs Wright was trying to avoid raising the topic of ethnicity. The female members of staff who had mentioned dress and appearance had tended to mention it, quite explicitly, in the context of both gender and ethnicity. As is shown here, when I asked Mrs Wright for an example of what she meant by her comment about appearance, in her desire to be evasive she mentioned Goths, despite the fact that this was not the most useful example as there were none at the school.

After a conversation about student cultures, popularity and academic success, I decided to introduce the subject of ethnicity in the context of other factors in a way in which I felt she might not feel threatened and would allow her scope, if she so chose, to talk about potential ethnic group and gender issues:

- NR "Do you think that peer culture plays a significant role in determining who wants to be successful and who doesn't?"
- Mrs Wright "I do."
- NR "And do you think that is more for boys, girls, Black pupils, white pupils?"
- Mrs Wright "I think it is more for boys, *er, I think we have, er, had, um still have an issue with Black boys* in as much as we have it outside. There is this sort of gang culture (...) it's a street culture, erm, and that does impact. And I think it's when you hear and you see *both white and Black boys*

around with their hoods up, erm, trying to look the part, erm, that I think is outside impacting and that is peers impacting because you wouldn't really walk around a hot building¹¹ like this with your hat on or big anorak hood up which is what they do. If you go up at lunch time, for example, you'll see them up there and *it's not just Black boys, it's Black and white boys* but it is again, this idea of a gang culture. And the little ones copy and that's worrying because they copy the way they walk, the way they dress." [emphasis added]

Although Mrs Wright has now been given the legitimacy to talk about ethnicity, she seems wary of doing so. Her initial reference to Black students is stilted and hesitant and further references are made acceptable by the repeated inclusion of white boys. For Mrs Wright the forms of dress that these boys display, and the way in which they walk, symbolises part of a wider gang culture. She highlights the same form of clothing that her colleagues mentioned earlier: hats and hoods and, as with Ms Hill, her analysis does not allow for the possibility of alternative interpretations other than the negative one she portrays. During this stage in the conversation, she gave an example of two Black boys who had attended Met., both of whom were from similar, middle class backgrounds and were deemed academically successful but one of whom "went off the rails". Although unable to suggest an exact reason for the eventual behaviour differences in the two boys, she considered that the boy's involvement in "gang culture" could be attributed to the following:

"...when he first came in - I went to his primary school - he was a *delightful little* boy and this is gonna sound really ridiculous perhaps but he became *very very tall very quickly* and he stood out and I think that that's when he began to try to be a bit of a...a bit of a mover."

The juxtaposition of "delightful" and "little" implies a degree of amicability and manageable cuteness with regard to the pupil's size during primary school. Through Mrs Wright's reading of the situation, problems began not just as a result of the pupil's height gain but because it occurred, in her mind, so quickly feasibly not allowing those around him time to adjust. This is conveyed through her repetitive and emphatic use of the word "very".

The negative explicit and implicit attributions made by staff members in relation to pupils' dress and way of walking automatically positions Black students as guilty of some as yet unidentifiable misdemeanour regardless of any semblance of innocence. Gillborn (1990) terms this the "myth of the Afro-Caribbean challenge" and showed how it resulted in more students of African Caribbean heritage being reprimanded and receive detentions even when engaging in similar behaviour as their counterparts of different ethnic groups (see also Ofsted, 2001 for similar findings).

¹¹ The teacher interviews took place in the winter. While there were radiators in the school the building was old and in need of repair (according to one teacher) and the windows often did not shut properly.

I have made a clear case for the importance of dress and demeanour in shaping views on which pupils are seen as academically successful. Only two members of staff, both part of the support team, appeared to critique this position. One was Ms Sinclair:

"There are some children in this school who because they fit the look of an academically successful child, yeah, often quite hard working, always does the work on time, they are labelled as being the gifted ones, the very academically able ones, when in actual reality they are not very able at all, they are just very hard working. (...) There's this white boy who is in all the top sets everywhere. To my mind the boy is very basic, yeah? He takes a long time to get things, he says 'I'm doing it a different way' and you sort of say, 'well that way is wrong, you're not going to get the right answer that way'. Because he's done the work on time always, he looks a certain way and he does work hard, he is getting there he has been labelled as achieving (...)" Ms Sinclair (Support staff, white female)

As I will now discuss, the other was Ms Bellingham, whose views were directly influenced by particular experiences with her son.

A complex interpretation of student cultures

One member of Met. staff, Ms Bellingham, offered a more complex interpretation of the particular pupil subcultures that many of her female colleagues found problematic. I describe it as complex as a contrast to the other views I have described so far in this chapter and because she was able to recognise more than one way in which the behaviour and dress of her son could be interpreted. Ms Bellingham was part of the Support team and her mindset had been directly influenced by her experiences with her son:

"...he just lost it when he came to the age that he was at, you know, having that was an extremely bad age to take GCSEs. But you know he was a baseball capped, Nike, baggy jeans, trainers, ear-ringed looking kid that would probably find himself being told off an awful lot outside on the streets although he wasn't doing anything particularly bad, it's just the way he looked. You know, people looked at him when he walked into shops, but you know he's done his GCSEs and he's gone university (...) he was perceived in a negative way and I've been walking into a shop with him when he was going through that stage of his life, you know, and you see security guards checking him out or whatever and that happened quite a lot (...) but he took on that persona because his mates did and he didn't want to be mugged on the streets like anyone else didn't want to be mugged on the street." Ms Bellingham (support staff, white female)

Ms Bellingham's son wore similar type of clothing that I have shown was described by some of the female members of staff as threatening. In this extract, she explains how the level of heightened surveillance her son experienced was related to the way in which he dressed rather than anything he was doing wrong emphasising, I argue, the way in which the apprehensions voiced by her colleagues, above, are based on damaging subjective assumptions and stereotypes often stripping boys of any innocence (see Ms Johnson, above) and giving further support to Gillborn's (1990) argument of a "myth".

The donning of particular forms of attire and behaviour reflected that of their peers but was also understood, by Ms Bellingham, as a way of negotiating a form of survival as a young male:

"I don't know what it is [that identifies a student as academically successful]. There's [sic] some very bright and intelligent young people, they put on a walk, like my son did, to get through, not being victimised or whatever. You do...you get your look together and then get as many academic qualifications as you want. You do, you get your look together so that is nothing to say whether you are gonna be more successful."

However, it is possible that Ms Bellingham's son experienced less surveillance than a comparable Black male counterpart due to his ethnicity and social class. She does not mention ethnicity in her account which could simply be indicative of the way in which whiteness is constructed as normal, stable and as requiring little critique both in academic research and wider society (see Leonardo, 2002) or it could also symbolise her confidence that her son's ethnicity *did not* play a role in attracting the suspicious gaze of others and that it was just his attire. It is possible that his position as a white middle class male allows him a certain advantage to appropriate and reject as he chooses forms of dress and demeanour that traditionally are imbued with negative and stereotyped constructions of an ethnicised subculture. His class and ethnicity therefore grant him a freedom to be released from harsh controls and surveillance in a way that is not afforded to other (minority) ethnic groups and social classes. Such freedom may mean that while working hard academically he also remains distant from additional powerful perceived markers of failure, was able to establish positive relationships with members of staff and ultimately increase the probability of securing academic success. As his mother reports:

"But you know he took on that look but he was middle class, middle road achiever who could have better but you know he got his A, Bs and Cs..." Ms Bellingham (Support staff, white female)

Pupils

"There's people who come in really badly dressed and that but they're really good at a subject. It doesn't matter how you're dressed." Rob Davies (Year 11, white)

I begin by examining pupils' perceptions of elements of the uniform inspection process. Then the role of appearance in relation to academic success is considered, under headings which mirror those of the teachers: those students who conceded that there was a relationship (Explicit Interpretation) and, those who offered a more *Complex Interpretation* regarding the construction of appearance. The students who rejected a possible association are discussed in the context of complex interpretations since, as will be shown, their views were not considered mutually exclusive. It is worth remembering that the comments below are based on the views of pupils

identified by the school as academically successful and this may well have influenced the types of responses that they provided.

Responses to school implementation of uniform guidelines

I have already described the different arenas and ways in which teachers attempted to regulate how pupils wore their uniform. Only three (two boys, one girl) of the academically successful students that were interviewed made reference to uniform monitoring in relation to classroom checks. For the boys, both of whom were from different year groups, the issue of uniform arose when asked about to talk about their least favourite teacher:

- | | |
|--------------|--|
| NR | "And which is your least favourite teacher?" |
| Joseph Ofori | (Year 9, Black African) "Maths teacher probably, Mr Condon because he always gives us a uniform check at the beginning of every lesson. Yeah, like at the beginning of every lesson we have to stand up and do our ties and stuff - see how our tie is done. Usually I don't do it." |
| NR | "How should your tie be done?" |
| Joseph | "It should be your button done at the top and your tie on top of the button so you can't see your t-shirt underneath." |

Joseph does not criticise the need for uniform checks per se but the way in which they are carried out by Mr Condon. Such is his frustration with the process that he refuses to co-operate and ultimately classes Mr Condon as one of his least favourite teachers. A similar sentiment is voiced by Year 11 pupil, Michael McNamara:

"I don't like Mr Condon our Maths teacher because when you go into the classroom, erm, you have to sit down, take off our coats and then we all have to stand up and he makes us...our ties have to be strangling us and our shirts have to be tucked in and our top button has to be done up as well. He does that every lesson and if it is not done then we can't sit down. I don't think there is any need to be doing that, especially in Year 11, he should just let us sit down and get on with the work." Michael McNamara (Year 11, Black Caribbean)

The level of regulation exercised by Mr Condon is perceived as unnecessarily strict and dogmatic and, as implied by Michael's repetitive use of "have to" appears to be followed with grudging obedience. Further, despite Mr Condon's efforts, it can be noted that he nonetheless has to repeat this act "every lesson", implying that it is ineffective as a method of control and that the pupils' reasons for reverting their uniform to their own interpretations of acceptability are clearly more valuable to them than acquiescing to Mr Condon's or the school's attempts at containment.

Only one female pupil mentioned the classroom checks but unlike the boys above, it was in response to the question regarding the identification of successful students:

"Yeah, I think you would [be able to identify successful students by looking]. Like at the moment, if you looked at me, I most probably don't look too successful because I don't look too smart or whatever. But if you go into a class, like when I am in class... in Maths - yeah that's a good one to come into - I think most of the people there is [*sic*] academically successful. 'Cos I'm in the top class for maths, yeah, and when we go in we have to make sure our ties are all straight and our shirts are all tucked in (...)"

Michelle Gregory (Year 9, Black British)

Michelle lists similar prerequisites for entering her Mathematics class [though it is not clear whether or not it is the same teacher] as those mentioned by the boys but in a manner which suggests that she is not uncomfortable with conforming to the rules or with the way in which they are enforced. Although the topic of uniform checks was not raised by a large number of female and male pupils, it is possible that the difference in Michelle's and her male peers comments reflect a wider gender difference about views on uniform. Firstly, the desire to appear academically successful to staff, peers and other parties in the school, is resisted by these boys but accepted by Michelle. A second possible analysis sees Michelle willing to conform and be reminded to conform to school rules regarding acceptable appearance because she feels it does relate to the overall perception of the academically successful pupil while the boys regard appearance as irrelevant to their pen and paper academic performance. In this way she is more likely to be situated by staff as demonstrating acceptable behaviour of the academically successful pupil. This is an interpretation suggested during the interview with Nathan Johnson.

Nathan Johnson

Pupil interviews were arranged by my school contact (Ms Jackson) and scheduled at a time chosen by the pupil. Despite this Nathan's interview had to be rescheduled on two occasions¹². The first time, I received a message from Ms Jackson that Nathan had not wanted to leave his lesson and the second time she approached me with the following explanation that I recorded in my fieldnotes:

"Ms Jackson went to him at break. Told me later in the staffroom that he was playing football with a mobile phone¹³ in his hand. When asked to come to meet me after break [he] moaned saying, 'Can't she come tomorrow? I've got to go somewhere.' Ms Johnson and I laughed about where he could possibly have to go since he should be in lesson."

¹² Simon Daniels (Year 11, Mixed Heritage) was the only other pupil interview which was rescheduled. He initially withdrew from the research, as he later explained, due to his desire to concentrate on his work and use lunchtimes (when some interviews took place) for extended study. He only agreed to meet with me once he was satisfied with the progress he had made in his work.

¹³ School rules stated that mobile phones are not allowed on the premises.

By mentioning that Nathan was carrying a mobile phone, Ms Jackson was able to tacitly inform me that this was a pupil who was not conforming to school guidelines. She also expressed doubt that Nathan would bother to turn up for a third rescheduled appointment. So before we had even met one another, I had an impression of a Black¹⁴ male student who appeared unreliable, who unashamedly flouted school rules¹⁵ and who clearly had no great desire to meet with me. Though the pupil interviews took place before those carried out with staff, I also already had some idea of staff impressions of Black male students and, despite my own position as a critical and reflexive Black researcher who was very much aware of the stereotypes surrounding Black males, I found myself questioning with some apprehension what the eventual meeting with Nathan might involve. It was only when I met him¹⁶ that I realised that I felt different about carrying out the interview with him compared to how I had felt with other pupils. I was nervous. I recognised that I had constructed an image of Nathan based entirely on staff criteria *and* without having ever met him. I was able to set aside my prejudgements about him and conduct the interview but was stunned by the way in which even I, in my brief time in the school had unwittingly bought in to a clearly powerful dominant discourse about Black male students.

During the interview, Nathan sat with "his eyes rarely meeting my gaze and slouching in his chair" (fieldnotes). His shirt was also hanging out. We reached the part of the interview about how to identify academically successful students:

- | | |
|-------------------|---|
| NR | "(...) 'Cos you're saying you can be academically successful and like have your shirt out (...)?" |
| Nathan
Johnson | (Year 11, Black African Caribbean) "Hmm, you can." |
| NR | "So then I'm lost. Does that mean that you can not do the school rules and still be academically successful?" |
| Nathan | "Yeah you can, you can. I think you can. As I said, it all boils down to your GCSEs, that's what I think and your level. It boils down to your GCSEs, what you achieve. And then you'll know how successful the person, how successful the student is." |

Nathan minimises the importance of school guidelines on uniform but as I have demonstrated, the dress and demeanour of Black male students in particular, is subject to specific attention at Metropolitan High due to the enforcement of the new rules on uniform and due to subconscious interpretations of appearance as part of a feared Black male subculture.

¹⁴ Provided by school records (see Chapter 3 - Methodology).

¹⁵ He could have hidden the phone as Ms Jackson approached.

¹⁶ He arrived wearing a cap low over his face reminding me of the images of threat mentioned by staff members earlier.

Youdell (2003) suggests that acquiring a bodily position such as slouching, which counters general school expectations of demeanour, enabled her low achieving Black boys to retain status and pride and, I would add, may have increased the likelihood that they would be perceived as disinterested and/or challenging to authority. While Nathan had been identified by the school as academically successful (and therefore different from Youdell's students) it was possible that he wanted to convey a message of disinterest or distance since he had not originally wanted to be interviewed. I noted his manner but chose not to attach any particular meaning to it with the aim of treating him as I had the other pupils. At the end of the interview I asked whether he had any questions or comments, as I did with all interviewees, and he made the following observation about the interview process:

- | | |
|--------|--|
| Nathan | "I had meetings with other people but, erm, I didn't really enjoy... I didn't really like it. Like I had a meeting with my mentor and I just didn't get on with her for some reason. But I enjoyed this one more." |
| NR | "Is it? Why did you not like it with her and what did you like about this?" |
| Nathan | "I couldn't really talk to her on a level but, with you I can talk with you on a level, innit." |
| NR | "Why do you think that is?" |
| Nathan | "We both respect each other maybe. (...)" |

His comment completely contradicted any of my initial interpretations of his behaviour as disinterested which is how he might have been perceived had I been one of the female members of staff mentioned earlier *especially* as he had continued to slouch and wear his cap throughout the interview. Once the interview had ended, Nathan appeared reluctant to leave and, eventually, I had to gently usher him from the room:

"NJ gets up to leave. He moves very slowly and to encourage the departure I walk him to the door, thanking him for his time. He must have said bye about a thousand times and he told me to take care of myself. He hovered slightly in the corridor and I shut the door. I re-entered the room with a totally different impression of the young man I had originally met." [fieldnotes]

It is difficult to say exactly what it was that made Nathan feel respected but one feasible explanation is that he was reassured by dissimilarity to staff who may have asked him to justify his prior absence¹⁷ and to modify his dress and posture. Yet it is his very disregard for appearance, his breaking of school rules, his subscription to a comportment that is constituted

¹⁷ He had asked me why I had not come to find him on the two previous occasions he had been scheduled for an interview. I explained that the interviews were a matter of choice but my research would be impossible without help from participants.

as unreceptive and as a threat that is likely to place Nathan, irrespective of his attainment as a successful student, under greater surveillance than those pupils who conform to the ideal.

As the next section shows, it appears that female students were more likely to fit this ideal as they tended to make an explicit association between appearance and academic attainment and valued subscribing to the stereotypical image of the successful student.

Explicit interpretation of student cultures

Four¹⁸ of the thirteen female interviewees, insisted that academically successful pupils could be identified by the way in which they dressed. There are two overarching observations that can be made about their beliefs: first, they regarded academically successful pupils as those who would quite simply abide by school rules and wear the correct uniform:

"[They are] the ones who wear perfect school uniform every day and they're never told to change their trainers or put on their blazers..."

Natasha Wright (Year 11, Black African Caribbean)

- | | |
|------------------|---|
| NR | "Is there other way I would be able to tell [who is not academically successful]? Would I be able to tell by looking at them?" |
| Tamika
Amiaka | (Year 10, Black African Caribbean) "Yeah, if their uniform is messy and..." <i>[laughs]</i> |
| NR | "What's a messy uniform?" |
| Tamika | "Their shirt's out and they ain't got no tie...sometimes. That's how I think you can tell, and they ain't got shoes on, they got their trainers on. So that's how you can also tell." |

Academically successful students, according to these female pupils, paid attention to the details of their appearance, taking pride in looking smart and showing concern about the views of others:

- | | |
|-----------|--|
| Catherine | (Year 11, Black British) "Well, if you ironed [your uniform], then it shows that you probably actually care about how you look and how people look at you and, er, you have a bag on your back. Some don't bring a bag sometimes or have like equipment" |
| NR | "So you have a bag? Why do some people have a bag and some people don't?" |
| Catherine | <i>[chuckles]</i> "They can't be bothered some of them." |

¹⁸ I have included Michelle Gregory (see Uniform Checks) in this number.

Second, although these female pupils place importance on appearance they differ from staff with similar explicit perceptions because they do not extrapolate their views to make inferences about ethnicity and gender. However, that these Black female pupils judge dress and demeanour to be correlated with success, and their related willingness to conform to this stereotype means they like Michelle Gregory, discussed earlier, have increased their legitimacy of being regarded positively according to the school's construction of academic success.

Complex interpretations of student subcultures

While girls seemed likely to regard appearance as an important variable in identifying academically successful pupils, a different pattern seemed to emerge from the boys' responses. They seemed more inclined to reject the idea that external appearance might relate to academic performance:

"There's people who come in really badly dressed and that but they're really good at a subject. It doesn't matter how you're dressed. You might get up to things outside of school which people may not like but you could still be really good at a subject. None of that really affects it, except for if they come in wearing baseball cap, chewing and they are not supposed to, then you might not think much of them."

Rob Davies (Year 11, white)

Although Rob does not condone flouting school uniform rules, the rejection of a definitive dress-work connection suggests, as shown with Nathan McNamara above, that boys would see less of a personal need to appear neat or smart. However, it also became apparent that this disregard for appearance served part of a *conscious* act of contravening stipulated uniform guidelines:

Paul Richards	(Year 10, Black African Caribbean) "(...) I kinda adapt and fit in with people that ain't academically successful..."
NR	"Really? In what way?"
Paul	"Hmm, the way I talk the way they talk, act the way they act, but I still finish my work and stuff."
NR	"So you talk the way they talk, you act the way they act. How do they talk?"
Paul	"Sort of with slang and stuff...While I'm academically successful, yeah, I still like mix it in and stuff. I act differently from academically successful students."

It is entirely feasible that Paul's adaptations, such as his acquired way of walking, are the same behaviours that some of the female members of staff, earlier described as challenging and threatening. As with Nathan, Paul knowingly displays an image that defies the ideal image of the successful pupil, perhaps with the naïve assumption that staff may hold similar views about the lack of dress-work relationship and therefore not judge and respond to him negatively. Paul's

comment demonstrates the importance placed on distancing oneself from the image of success. Consider the following interaction with Year 9 pupil Joseph Ofori (Black African):

- | | |
|--------------|---|
| NR | "And does it matter if it [the tie] is long or short?" |
| Joseph Ofori | "It usually has to be about 3 or 4 stripes but I just keep it short." |
| NR | "(...) If I had my tie long what would that mean?" |
| Joseph | "It would mean that you would be a boffin." |
| NR | "Right, because of how I've got my tie?" |
| Joseph | "Yeah." |
| NR | "Thinking about the school, do you think most people have got their ties more than four?" |
| Joseph | "Probably four or probably less." |
| NR | "So most people don't wanna get seen as a boffin. Why do you think that is?" |
| Joseph | "Cos people get teased." |

The adaptation of appearance and behaviour serves as a survival technique in an environment where academically successful students, and it would appear that boys especially Black boys are more affected by this than Black girls, are likely to be teased by others. The objective, therefore, is to establish a distance from certain markers of academic success which might see them teased by peers but not, however, to the extent of neglecting school work itself. Note Paul's desire to finish his work and, moreover, the fact that these are students chosen by the school¹⁹ for their academic success.

Of course, the side effect of this survival strategy is that it does go against school rules and, in addition is subject to the negative judgements of (mainly female) members of staff. This signifies some of the tension that exists for successful Black male pupils between attempting to negotiate a survival within the context of the teacher subculture or field²⁰ compared to the need to survive within the pupil context:

"The only way you can [be academically successful and not get called names] is if you are quite big or strong or something like that but you're still smart and you have, erm, you feel you're someone who'll be confronted by bully, you can walk with a bit of attitude but you're still smart. Then you can get away with it, get away without being cussed."

Curtis Mayers (Year 10, Black British)

¹⁹ See Methods for the way in which this selection took place.

²⁰ The notion of "field" is a Bourdieuan term which I describe in detail in Chapter 9.

This need to manipulate uniform to avoid being teased also provides a convincing explanation of a possible gender difference (see above) in the way in which uniform checks were perceived and experienced by some of the male students at Metropolitan High.

Additional Survival Strategies

Unlike the students mentioned above, one Black male student appeared to distance himself from behaviours which he categorised as reflective of less successful students. Our particular interview was taking place at the end of a corridor, near a fire exit, that was part of an extension building to the school where no formal lessons took place. During the interview we were interrupted by two pupils who while passing us to walk through the exit, noticed the tape recorder and shouted towards it. Curtis responded:

“Academically successful students don’t do *that* and interrupt meetings and try and bop through the hallways.” Curtis Mayers (Year 10, Black British)

Bopping where “people [are] trying to walk with a limp, but [are] trying to have an attitude at the same time or something” (Curtis Mayers) was part of the demeanour that some of the Black male students and female members of staff referred to earlier. Although Curtis recognised the survival benefits to acquiring certain behaviours (see *Complex Interpretations* above), he is reluctant to be associated with a subculture that he understands to be linked with failure.

“I’m not dissin’ the people in this school but most of them tend to be quite shallow. So if you walk around...wearing the latest trainers and latest shoes and stuff like that, people tend to be friends with you...People who don’t like wear their school trousers and shoes, and wear like their Nike trainers and Nike jeans whatever, you tend to be popular ‘cos students in the school are quite shallow so they tend to follow that person.” Curtis Mayers (Year 10, Black British)

Curtis also rejects uniform adaptation in a way that purposefully situates him outside of this particular student subculture. His comment is disparaging and is similar to Mr Condon’s (see Teachers section earlier) in that he rejects the status inferred through acquiring the latest fashion trends. It will come as no surprise that Curtis wore the correct uniform, with his tie showing more than the four strip minimum. In this way he was able to minimise any extra attention attributed to him from staff due to the fact that he is a Black male by subscribing to school uniform norms which, in turn, may increase the likelihood that he is construed as successful and “receptive”. It was not clear whether this, consequently, affected the nature of his relationships with Black male peers.

Part of the complexity in negotiating school successfully is conveyed by Samuel Owusu (Year 11, Black African) who explained to me how he was unable to perform one of the criteria he

understood as important in being situated as academically successful, following an incident with a teacher that in which he felt he had be unfairly treated:

"From then on I just thought, (...) a teacher's now just literally a teacher to me, nothing else. 'Cos usually you should fraternise with teachers and be social with them, but now it's like go in there, do the lesson and leave. That's how I see them now."

Samuel's response is very similar to Gillborn's (1990) Paul Dixon who after being asked about his views of a teacher whom he had previously considered prejudiced responded:

"He hasn't changed really, it's just that I don't talk to him that much – I only answer the Register." (p. 62)

These Black male students employ strategies to attempt to reduce their visibility in the school by minimising contact with staff who could present a potential source of conflict. In this way, it can be seen that to regard school as a straightforward process, of lesson attendance and homework completion, is overly simplistic. Here even these *academically successful* Black male students have to adopt a number of techniques or survival strategies, to negotiate a safe existence with both peers, from whom they are the subject of teasing and, staff members who construct their ethnicity as an all-pervasive threat.

Discussion

"I don't think they realise their behaviour in the classroom is monitored subconsciously or consciously by the teacher (...) it is as much social skills as it is academic success as well."

Ms Sinclair (Support staff, white female)

I have shown how the issue of appearance and demeanour has a particular significance in Metropolitan High especially for female members of staff. In addition, I have demonstrated that it is certain forms of behaviour and dress, those which were associated with and conveyed almost exclusively by Black male students, which are construed as a threat and problematic. I show that staff regard the display of these type of student subcultures as contradicting perceptions of a "desirable student identity" (Youdell, 2003) so that those pupils who do not conform to it become more likely to be constructed as unsuccessful (see especially Ms Hill's discussion of the receptive student). I argue that the implicit or hidden nature of the behaviours and demeanours embedded in these desired identities, not only extends the definition of academic success beyond a pen and paper exercise but the very *covert*ness of staff values regarding these desirable identities and those which are and are not given status, makes the achievement of academic success inequitable. In other words, I am suggesting that there are a set of value judgements or rules intrinsic to the acquisition of academic success that remain, for the most

part, shaded from the pupils. The rules of this success game are especially problematic for Black boys as they seek to survive both academically within the specific context of school staff and societal views about Black youth and, as they strive to maintain a parallel successful existence amongst peers.

Within this analysis, there are three issues that require further attention: the gender and ethnicity of interviewed staff; pupils' gender; and, the consequences of the fear conveyed by the staff in this chapter.

Gender and ethnicity of interviewed staff

Most of the staff views in this chapter are by female members of staff revealing a sexualised positioning of Black male pupils where they are seen as a objects of fear and a threat; an observation echoed by one female member of the teaching staff:

"I mean the teaching profession is mostly white...female. I think there's an element... it's a minority but a significant minority of white female teachers... of fear of Black boys and I think that is something that isn't recognised and I know that's contentious but I think it does operate." Ms Wilson (Head of English, white female)

The evidence presented in this research demonstrates that the ethnicised stereotypical construction of Black male pupils to which Ms Wilson refers is not, however, limited solely to white female staff. The Black female staff were often the most expressive and biased in their judgements which, following a culturalist approach²¹, sees the "street culture" lifestyle and families of young Black people as directly culpable for their lack of academic success²². These staff say nothing of the factors important in the running of effective schools nor of the (now well-established) historical context of educational failure of Black pupils. The lack of complexity in their views (and I suggest that this is not limited to these particular staff) challenges the current governmental agenda that increasing the representation of staff from similar ethnic backgrounds is a major way of tackling "underachievement" of Black students²³ (see TTA, 2003c:11).

While representation by ethnicity is important, individual identity and its interplay with ethnicity is complex and a shared ethnicity does not automatically ensure a shared perception of the world,

²¹ See Literature Review

²² It is possible that many of the Black staff members made the assumption because I am also Black (female) that I would share their views and therefore felt comfortable to express quite extreme opinions.

²³ The Teacher Training Agency's 1999-2002 target was to increase the number of those from minority ethnic backgrounds to Initial Teacher Training courses from 6% to 9%, to match the numbers of pupils from similar backgrounds. The current figure remains at 7% but raising this percentage still remains a "very high" priority within its Race Equality Scheme (TTA 2003c) and its current Corporate Plan states it remains committed to reaching this target by 2005/6 and ensuring it is maintained for at least the following 3 years (TTA, 2004).

nor of viewing its various problems and solutions. Further, the government position implies that Black teachers cannot also be racist towards Black pupils (see also Sewell, 1999:17, who found evidence of similar stereotypical views from Black staff).

The teachers (of all ethnicities) in this study may not be overtly racist but by categorising student subcultures in terms of physicality, power and ethnicity, they are drawing on racist historical and contemporary stereotypes to inform their interpretations and as I show in Chapter 8, their treatment of pupils.

Pupil's gender

I found that the successful Black boys involved in this study hold a particular perception of achievement and some employed a range of survival strategies in order to 'do school'. Black girls by comparison do not receive as much attention as their male counterparts *due to their gender and* because they dress and act in a way that befits school's guidelines and construction of success. Thus this enables Black girls to have more opportunities for success while Black boys have fewer. This is reflected in quantitative and qualitative achievement research which indicates that for Black pupils, girls tend to perform (slightly) better than boys (Mac an Ghaill, 1988; Mirza, 1992; Gillborn & Gipps, 1996) though the indications are that they are still not attaining equally in relation to their white counterparts (Gillborn & Mirza, 2000) (see Chapter 2 - Literature Review, p.29 for a detailed discussion of this issue).

Despite distancing themselves from external markers of success via their dress, speech and demeanour, I have shown that Black boys *do* care about achieving, as shown by their remarks in this chapter and by Ms Sinclair's comment (see Chapter 5, Dress and Demeanour p. 69) that many come to her to work in secret:

"(...) a lot of them are very very clever boys. They come here secretly and they do work with me that no-one else knows about. So that's the kind of thing we're dealing with where sometimes it's not cool to be clever but they wanna be anyway."

This challenges Sewell's (2000:21) notion of a crude "anti-school culture" existing as the key motivational force for Black pupils. Instead, their school existence is one of constant negotiation as they attempt to avoid the peer stigma associated with success while aspiring, simultaneously, to achieve high grades.

Consequences of fear

Other qualitative research carried out in both primary and secondary schools has already demonstrated that African Caribbean students are frequently reprimanded because of the way they walk, talk or wear their hair (Wright, 1986; Mac an Ghaill, 1988; Gillborn, 1990; for details

see Literature Review) and this extra attention is believed to contribute to the disproportionate numbers of Black, especially Black male, exclusions from school (DfES, 2005b). The female members of staff, discussed in this chapter, talked about distancing themselves from the perceived threat of the Black male (see especially Ms Hill, Ms Johnson). It is plausible then that within the context of the school that as a result of this fear and this need to maintain distance, Black boys are subject to increased surveillance, as staff attempt to find acceptable methods through which they can create a similar safe space. Simply being watched more increases the possibility for staff-pupil conflict and may, in part, explain the high numbers of Black boys at Met. who received exclusions from school²⁴, further restricting their opportunity for academic success.

In presenting these views about definitions of academic success, failure and forms of dress and demeanour, I am revealing some of the complexities involved in educational achievement and especially in the achievement of Black pupils. I have shown that a range of quite fixed staff perceptions about the identity construction of pupils regarded to be high or low attaining both contrasts to and is dialectically interwoven with pupil views on becoming successful. That is to say, it is unlikely that pupils will have a chance of succeeding academically unless they share and effectively demonstrate both the explicit and implicit rules involved in acquiring success. Further, the visibility and historicity attached to being a Black male places a further tension in the play for academic success.

In this chapter, I have also expressed some of the tensions that exist for pupils as they attempt to negotiate school successfully. In the next chapter, I turn my attention to how some of the views expounded by Met. staff about high and low achieving pupils manifest in everyday practice.

²⁴ Although I did not examine the specific reasons for these exclusions.

Chapter 7 Differential treatment of pupils.

I have shown that staff identifiers of the academically successful pupil were not based solely on academic performance, that they differed somewhat from successful pupils' perceptions of academic success and that staff construction of *who* was likely to succeed was multi-layered and influenced by personal and societal stereotypes pertaining to social class, ethnicity and perceived individual characteristics. Figure 7.1 provides an overview of these perspectives as a preface to this chapter which is concerned with the way in which the two sets of pupils - successful and unsuccessful ones - are treated. The data in this table can be compared with that in Figure 2 which outlines the data from the successful pupils.

As in previous chapters, I discuss staff and pupil evidence in separate sections. The responses for both are based on interview and observational data about how staff treat successful and unsuccessful students and about which pupils were most popular with staff. Staff place a particular emphasis on the role of educational procedures and initiatives and the way they contribute to an increase in differential staff treatment. I begin the chapter, therefore, by offering a brief overview of some of the tests and assessments which pertain to these educational procedures before examining staff and pupil evidence.

Fig. 7.1 Summary of staff' constructions of successful and unsuccessful pupils.¹

Characteristics	<u>Successful pupils</u>	<u>Unsuccessful pupils</u>
	Girls Organised Motivated Clear goals/aspirations Good conversational skills/analytical Receptive [the right level of self-esteem]	Boys Disorganised [less motivated] Ineffective future planning [lack of/poor communication] [disengaged] Low or too much self-esteem
Ability	(Usually) innate	[can be acquired]
Appearance/ demeanour	Abide by school uniform rules Minimal or no obvious display of ethnicised/ Black subcultures (dress, walk, hip hop)	[disobey school rules] Influenced by ethnicised student subcultures (dress, walk, hip hop)
	No strong individual identity	Portrayal of individuality
Social Class	Middle class (parents 'good' jobs, educated)	Working class
Family/home environment	Dual parentage Parents value & demonstrate understanding of education Attend parents' evenings (ask the right questions) Access to books, learn instruments, computer	Single parentage No/little value of education or poorly demonstrated Infrequent attendance of parents' evenings (ask wrong/too many questions) [little extended learning/poor financial acumen]
	Own room/space to work [few siblings/manageable household] [calm/organised environment]	[cramped living conditions] Number of young siblings Difficult/stressed circumstances

Fig. 7.2: Academically successful students' constructions of academically successful students.

Characteristics	<u>Successful students</u>	<u>Less successful students</u>
	Girls (boys) hard workers not too noisy	<i>no specific groupings</i>
Ability	anyone can succeed	
Appearance/ demeanour	wear correct uniform/attention to detail (girls)	

Assessment and the National Curriculum

Between the ages of 5 and 16, pupils sit a series of tests as part of a process to determine whether or not they have reached specific levels of the National Curriculum (NC). These tests,

¹ Comments in square brackets denote the unspoken inferences of the explicit data provided in the corresponding column.

called Standard Assessment Tests, and frequently referred to as SATS, take place at the end of each Key Stage (see Fig. 7.3 below). Within this period of compulsory education, the NC is divided into four key stages that represent different age spans and levels. There are eight levels of increasing difficulty and pupils are expected to reach an expected level (shown here in brackets) according to their age.

Year Group	Reception	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Age of pupils at end of year	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Key Stage	KS 1			KS 2				KS 3			KS 4	
Level	1-3 (2)			2-5 (4)				3-7 (5/6)			Via National Qualifications	

Fig. 7.3: Attainment targets and level descriptions for the National Curriculum²

The SATs taken at the end of Key Stage 2 form part of the profile which accompanies each pupil to secondary school. According to Met staff, these SATS are used in part of a probability calculation to generate predictions of pupils' future performance at Key Stage 3. The SATs taken at the end of Key Stage 3, in turn, are used to predict the results of Key Stage 4 examinations (traditionally GCSEs and GNVQs³).

Staff

"Expectations are definitely key, I think, obviously because a teacher will have different expectations of who is academically successful." Ms Wilson (Head of subject area, white female)

This section looks at the formal system and informal markers of differential treatment. The formal system looks at specific educational structures and processes within Met. that support different treatment of pupils. The informal system refers to implicit or unspoken processes which some teachers reported play a role in the treatment of different groups of pupils.

The Formal System

I first discuss how staff regard the wider education system as encouraging division amongst pupils before examining how pupils become treated differently due to intake, testing and prediction procedures. In closing this section on the formal system, I show how classroom practices of setting and mixed ability teaching also affect staff treatment of pupils.

² Source: Department for Education and Employment & Qualifications & Curriculum Authority (1999)

³ General National Vocational Qualifications.

The Education System

In describing whether academically successful pupils were likely to be treated differently, staff explained that the very fact that pupils entered secondary school at different levels of prior attainment with the role of the teacher being to move them beyond that level, meant that pupils were given different types of work and therefore treated differently:

“You know it’s about raising achievement and attainment and all that sort of stuff, you treat them differently, I mean you have to on one level because you have to give them different work. If you are clever, if someone comes into this school and you want to make them cleverer...I mean clever is a very poor word, but you know what I mean, you want to improve them, so you gotta know where they are and you gotta give them the stuff that’s good for them. I can’t give a clever kid...I can’t say ‘oooh, I’m a socialist’ and give a very clever kid and a very low ability kid the same work (...).”

Mr Bailey (teacher, Black male)

Teaching the same topic to a group of pupils and varying it, as Mr Bailey describes, according to their individual attainment level is called differentiation. The way in which this was employed by staff in Met. and its relationship to the selection of pupils into teaching groups is discussed later in this chapter. While it appears that Mr Bailey regarded differentiation as an inevitable part of his teaching practice there was no evidence from his interview that this knowledge of pupils’ level affected his subsequent perception or treatment of them. His colleague, Mr Sanderson’s view of the education system was that not only were students who had been defined as academically successful automatically more likely to succeed but they were also likely to gain a number of additional benefits as a direct consequence of their achievements. For example, he suggests that staff are more positive to them *because* they complement and support the overall objectives of the education process:

“The system is set up for academically able kids so they are more likely to do well aren’t they? So to the students they’re gonna say ‘well done, you’ve done this well’. They are going to get more praise. The system is that, you know, *these are the rules and they’re the kids who can follow those rules, so they’re gonna get the praise*. We deal with, we do reward and praise effort as well, er, but then that is something we have to make a conscious effort to do you see what I mean? If you just go along with the system then the academically able kids get the rewards and the praise, the grades but you have to make a conscious effort to praise the kids who put a lot of effort in because the system isn’t built up to recognise effort as much.”

Mr Sanderson (teacher, white male) [emphasis added]

Mr Sanderson makes an interesting point that once identified as successful academically, pupils are readily positioned as likely to abide by school rules and be well-behaved⁴ and that teachers are more amenable to students who fall into this category. This mirrors the theory presented by

⁴This assumed relationship between academic performance and behaviour is one that was observed and commented on by the pupils in this research. It is discussed further in the pupil section on Discipline later in this chapter.

French social theorist Pierre Bourdieu who argues that pupils whose disposition most closely matches the values of the school or who are regarded as having legitimacy within the context of the rules and norms of the school are most likely to be rewarded and to achieve academically (see Grenfell & James, 1998: 21). I suggest that Mr Sanderson's perspective may also be influenced by prevailing educational initiatives and reforms which place an emphasis on schools to continually view achievement in terms of A* to C grades⁵. Indeed as I have shown, the evidence from the staff interviews and school observations, summarised in Fig. 7.1, indicates that academic success and the perception of *who* is likely to be successful incorporates a range of additional factors beyond simply grades. Pupils are situated by staff as significantly disadvantaged if they come from particular family backgrounds and/or subscribe to ethnicised subcultures which are perceived to reduce the likelihood of success. These findings imply that academically successful students who do not exercise the full academic profile, as shown in the table, may therefore be less likely to be regarded as truly successful and not receive the same condoning and positively reinforcing treatment as their ideal counterparts. In Mr Sanderson's example such pupils would receive reward and praise only as an after-thought, giving the impression that main staff time and commitment is with those students who present as ideal and who are regarded as a safe bet for achieving success⁶.

Intake and test predictions

At the start of this chapter, I outlined some of the statutory testing and assessment procedures that take place across secondary schools in England and Wales. The pressure that such tests put on Met. is apparent from the following staff comment:

"I think the whole school structure has become more and more test orientated (...) In some ways it's good because it gets them [pupils] used to the way tests work but in other ways instead of just concentrating on the teaching and learning, *we are always focusing on the fact that you've got these tests* and you've got to learn to revise, you've got to revisit topics and we have to go through tests with them and I think sometimes it takes away the focus from the where it should be. (...). Maybe we should be saying we should still be looking at this new topic or we should be investigating...and the teacher becomes very focused on the outcome of these tests and the exam instead of saying we are going to do this because this is a good thing to do. So *we structure everything we teach now to what is the final outcome, which is the exam.*"

Ms Buckley (Head of subject area, white female) [emphasis added]

This emphasis on testing places pressure on Met. to improve performance each year based on its previous results and based on comparisons with other local schools (see Chapter 2 - Literature Review, p.27). This encourages Met. staff to think and act in ways that endorses the increased achievement of A* to C grades, the main criteria for success. In Chapter 4, a number

⁵ For further discussion of the practices employed to increase the probability of pupils achieving A* to C grades, see Gillborn & Youdell (2000).

⁶ The section on the Informal System describes additional attributions made by staff about academically successful students.

of staff gave the impression that although they recognised success in these terms, they rejected it in favour of an arguably more liberal inclusive approach that saw achievement in terms of individual progress. This might suggest that, although engaging in the tests as part of their formal teaching obligations, they might display a more relaxed attitude to them as they attempt to give support to their liberal perspectives. Ms Buckley's comment, however, indicates that this is not the case as most of the timetable and a great deal of teacher time and energy is in fact devoted to practising or reviewing tests revealing a genuine concern about the final test outcome. This is reflected more clearly by Mr Condon who, despite dismissing the focus on A* to C grades as an objective of the government and Senior Management shows how *he* is also caught up in the same agenda:

"I put a lot of kids in this year for Maths and I said really to the previous deputy head, 'yeah', I said, 'listen, we'll call this a trawl, we'll just put 'em in. I will teach them, I'll give up all my time and we'll see what we get. Let's just see what we get because the school at the end of the day will be judged, you know, it's judged on the exam passes. So if we get some Ds well that's fine, then they know the Ds. And then we put them again in November - we'll have another crack at it.' Well then we had a bit of argument about, 'Oh, er, we can't put them in until we're absolutely sure they're Cs.' " Mr Condon (teacher, white male)

Here Mr Condon is repeating part of a conversation that he had with a member of the Senior Management team (SMT) about improving pupil attainment in Maths. Interestingly, despite initially rejecting the testing regime altogether, he supports the focus on A* to Cs and seeks ways to increase pupil achievement at this level. The repeated entry of pupils to tests to enable them to gain familiarity with the process is regarded as one way of improving overall achievement, which I showed earlier is a position also shared with Ms Buckley. Further, this process enables the school to identify and provide further support to pupils described as "borderline", in other words those students who, with additional support, could move from a D to the all important C grade which equates to a pass at GCSE⁷. As I noted earlier, grades C and above are interpreted as most valuable in the performance tables, so often used to assess the success of a school. So, despite earlier claims to the contrary, staff at Metropolitan High school are committed to a definition of achievement as promoted by governmental standards. This is supported, not just by the above evidence but by the fact that following their last Ofsted inspection, which took place 10 months prior to the current research, they had introduced a string of measures that made them a "data-rich institution" (Metropolitan High School assessment summary, undated) to specifically increase the number of pupils achieving within this higher grade band. For example, the measures included the appointment of a Learning Mentor to work specifically with borderline D/C Year 11 pupils and the introduction of revision

⁷ Note that as mentioned in the Literature Review p.27 A* - G are passes at GCSE but it is A* - C grades that are perceived as having the better status. Note also that the conversation between Mr Condon and the SMT staff member was focused on D and C grades rather than general passes of G and above.

centres for Year 9 and 11 students. That these revision centres are not targeted at other Year groups indicates the importance of providing a spurt of extra support before Key Stage 3 assessments (which I explained earlier are used to predict Key Stage 4 results) and during the crucial period before the Year 11 examinations themselves. This is just one example of how students receive resources and treatment tailored according to whether or not they have been defined as academically successful.

I do not believe that this commitment to testing and A* to C acquisition necessarily contradicts earlier staff accounts for a more flexible notion of academic success (see Chapter 4). Indeed, some of the initiatives listed during the Ofsted inspection were also aimed at recognising pastoral achievements⁸ (see below) but there was a general impression that staff at Met were struggling with the need to remain accountable and to be seen to be achieving by socio-political markers of success and, at the same time, to maintain their desire and commitment to a recognition and encouragement of individual progress and achievement in non-traditional subjects, as arguably determined by the catchment area of the school. I believe this dual definition arises from the belief that success can have multiple meanings but is strongly influenced by a *fixed* perception of what their students are felt able to achieve based on their ability profile on entry to the school at Year 7 and which is compounded by whether or not the pupil fits the ideal academically successful profile, as assistant headteacher, Mrs Wright explains:

“Our intake tends to be towards the middle, we don’t have our full quota of band 1s and 1as. What they do is they do their SATs at the end of Year 6, as you know their key stage 2 results, but they are actually banded in Year 5 and the admissions is based on some testing that the authority does in Year 5 and they are given a band 1a, 1b, 2a, 2b and 3 and we should take a quota which is equivalent to each banding. We don’t take a full quota of band 1 students but we have spaces so we have to take on band 3s.”

Mrs Wright (SMT, white female)

According to the school prospectus, Met. aims for 40% admissions for groups 1 and 2 and 20% for group 3⁹. Their intake rarely matches this target, as was shown in Chapter 4, and this is thought to be due to the deceptive tactics of a number of nearby secondary schools who despite giving the illusion of being comprehensive actually selected the best (or in this context the ideal) pupils at point of intake. According to staff reports, the remaining scarcity of high attaining students left Met. with spaces that it had no choice but to fill with lower status band 3 students who had not achieved as well.

⁸ Though these tended to be directed at different groups of pupils.

⁹ At the end of Year 5 all pupils within the LEA sit tests in Mathematics and English, the results of which are divided into five bands: 1a, 1b, 2a, 2b and 3, with band 1 reflecting pupils who scored highest in the tests. Schools admit a LEA-determined percentage of pupils within each band and, as Mrs Wright explains, if they are undersubscribed for a higher band they must admit pupils from lower bands. The places cannot be left empty.

These intake bandings are thought to relate directly with the grades that a pupil is able to achieve later in his or her school life. Predicting pupil achievement in this way provides teachers with a way of ascertaining the type of work they set and later, pupil membership of teaching groups which are divided by ability level¹⁰:

"So if you got [level] two¹¹, it is possible that you can get a six but the chances are, er, three percent, so you're not thinking 'oh yeah, that's okay'. But if you got a level four, you've got a ninety five percent chance of getting a level six, you see, so what they do is make predictions. They make predictions saying 'this person came in [to Year 7] with a level two, it is predicted that by the end of Key Stage three, they will get a level four. If you fall below that its like [*shrugs shoulders and exhales*]."

Mr Bailey (teacher, Black male)

As Mr Bailey explains, these predictions indicate the likelihood of a pupil achieving a certain level at a later key stage based on comparisons with what pupils with similar achievement levels attained in the past. This revisits earlier discussion (Chapter 4) about the ways in which success is defined and strongly implies that the teaching process itself can be seen to serve two functions: either to simply ensure that pupils reach the level already predicted through testing (*expected potential*) or, that test predictions may act as a guide or a minimum level of acceptability for any pupil so that the teaching and learning process becomes about enabling pupils to *exceed* any predictions of their final attainment. I also noted in Chapter 4 that of the interviewed staff, only two described academic success in these latter terms, one of whom was a member of support staff. Therefore, it would appear that the notion of who is and who is not able to achieve is established early on in the pupil's life at Metropolitan High and is regarded as relatively fixed by many staff. This is substantiated by an additional perspective shared by one member of staff, who argued that the way in which testing was structured only allowed for a certain percentage of the pupil population to pass. In other words, in her opinion, not everyone was able to pass examinations because their design ensured that some would pass and others fail:

"The aim for any person in their own mind is to get an A to C but for some I think it is a target that I don't think they will meet because the way the whole exam system is designed, is that you will get people who pass and people who will fail but if a C is a pass there will be 50%, you know, a minimum that gets a C (...) You know the normal distribution curve [*draws the graph in my field notebook*]...if you think that that [*mid point on the curve*] is a D so if all people's exams are drawn on a line, less than 50% will get above a C nationally (...)" Ms Buckley (Head of subject area, white female)

Ms Buckley contends that every pupil should aspire to achieve A to C in examinations but explains that this is impossible for every pupil to attain especially within mathematics where the mid point on the distribution curve is a D. According to her explanation, this means that 50% of

¹⁰ According to the school website, Years 7 is taught in mixed ability groups and setting starts from Year 8.

¹¹ That is National Curriculum levels (see earlier section on Assessment and the National Curriculum)

the national pupil population will achieve a D grade and above even though a D equates to a fail (by Ms Buckley's, Met.'s and socio-political standards) meaning that fewer pupils are likely to achieve between A star and C at GCSE Mathematics. Despite the fact that some pupils might fail as a result of the organisation of the education assessment procedure, there is no reason why this failure should be more frequent amongst any individual ethnic group. Yet Black pupils were seldom likely to feature in staff discussions on academic success, tending instead to be mentioned with alarming frequency in relation to discussions about who was likely to fail at school.

Next, I examine staff views of group teaching practices of setting by ability and mixed ability groups and show how simply not being *constructed* as academically successful or by not acting in ways to highlight one's academic success can have disastrous consequences for pupils and Black pupils in particular.

Setting by ability

The predictions made at point of entry to secondary education were used by Met to determine pupil membership to teaching groups divided by attainment level. Staff explained that pupils were free to move between groups depending on teacher assessment, which took place throughout the academic year, and on pupil performance in yearly tests. For example, Mathematics was divided into three separate teaching groups based on attainment levels. Pupils in the extension group had been predicted to get A* to D grades in their GCSE examinations; those in the core group between B and E and those in the foundation groups had been predicted to achieve between a D and G grade. For Mathematics it then followed¹² that those pupils in the extension group were seen as able to achieve above the national average (which Ms Buckley explained earlier was a D); pupils in the core group, the highest they could achieve was a B grade and if they failed or did not do well enough to achieve an E, they would receive a U (ungraded). Finally, the most pupils in the foundation group could attain was a D, a fail by societal standards.

Some teachers favoured teaching classes of pupils who had a narrow band of "ability" as this meant that less time was required to adapt the lesson to cater for varying pupil needs. They expressed a general perception that pupils in higher ability classes were more likely to be motivated and receptive to teacher instruction.

"If you have a class full of academically able students you wouldn't necessarily have, erm, to try motivate students, you wouldn't have to think about differentiation, you

¹² If pupils were entered for examinations that corresponded directly to their set group.

wouldn't have to think about the appropriate resources or working with support assistants in class or any of those things, erm, I think it would be less hard for the teacher." Mrs Wright (SMT, white female)

From this comment, it seems that Mrs Wright aspires to teach within an environment which requires minimal preparation and work on her part as a teacher. Note that the concern is neither with a possible lack of "appropriate resources" nor lack of available and suitably experienced "support assistants" as a hindrance to her teaching but the mere fact that by having a classroom full of students whom she describes as "academically able", she is able to avoid having to address the need for this type of support in the first place. It is also interesting that her focus is concentrated on the experience of the teacher with no consideration of the experiences and perspectives of the pupil. While again this may be reflective of the particular context of Metropolitan High, it does pose a series of questions about the way in which individuals perceive their role as teachers. There is a sense that successful students present little if any challenge to the teacher who relishes this as the ideal, thus confirming Mr Sanderson's earlier observation that teachers favour students who fit in with the rules and objectives of the school environment. Teachers who supported setting tended to do so unquestioningly with minimal consideration of potential disadvantages, as the following comment exemplifies:

"You could say there is a stigma attached to it [setting] if you are in the bottom set and you see yourself as being a bottom set student etcetera etcetera, erm, if you are in the top set obviously you're gonna feel a bit of pride etcetera. *But I don't look at it from the child's point of view. I look at it entirely from the teaching point of view.* If you teach a mixed class, to cater for it appropriately is nigh impossible if your range is too great. Even within setted classes, you've still got differentiation in there, you still got a range but you've actually got a chance of achieving it, whereas if you're teaching a maths class and you've got a child who doesn't really know his times tables and you've got another child who is pretty comfortable with algebra, er, to teach them in the same room is, to do justice to both of them is nigh impossible." Mr Brown (teacher, white male)

Mr Brown attempts to appeal to presumed notions of logic and commonsense in advocating the merits of setting by ability. He maintains, for example, that a mixed class may have pupils with a broad range of ability levels but that this range becomes more manageable if split into three teaching groups based on ability. While this reasoning from a teaching perspective may make some sense, his wholesale disregard for how the process affects the pupils is extremely concerning if only because as subjects of the process, they are in a strong position to voice their views about the advantages and disadvantages of setting by ability. By denying any relevance to their point of view, Mr Brown conveys the unsettling impression that their experience is irrelevant to the teaching and learning process and further implies that pupils are expected to be passive and acquiescing recipients during the teaching and learning process. The method of setting by ability remains unproblematised as though its efficacy is beyond doubt. Like his

colleague Mrs Wright, he prioritises his experience and needs as a teacher above those of the pupil, evoking Paolo Friere's (1996) analogy of the education system as a bank in which the teachers as the power-holders are the depositories of knowledge and the pupils are seen to be the inert recipients. It also reinforces the evidence of the power differential between the two groups and that learning is perceived to take place in one direction only; that is from teacher to pupil with the teacher remaining detached from the process (see also Rogers 1983).

Mr Brown's and Mrs Wright's opinion about the characteristics of academically successful students (as motivated, receptive and well-behaved) and the benefits of teaching them may equally be borne out in a mixed ability teaching group in a way that still results in some pupils being bored and disruptive. It is also possible that Mr Brown's perspective was one that was accentuated by the experience of working in stressful environment that was struggling to retain credibility as a school that could do well by government standards. I share, in the next chapter, some of the frustrations of both interviewed and non-interviewed staff as they attempt to give legitimacy to the work that they do within the local context of the school and, as they also, struggle to maintain recognition within the wider societal and education system.

Unlike Mr Brown Mrs Hempcott, who also extols the merits of setting by ability, describes how she feels pupils might view the process. In the following extract, she recounts how setting by ability was used successfully in a school where she previously worked:

"(...) the students were set by ability for different subjects so for example if you were better in English, you were in the top set for English (...). They knew where they were, you could move them up. There was always that idea that you could move between the levels. They weren't stuck there or if you didn't perform up there you would come down. So there was always that you know, 'I am working for myself, I am not working for anybody else. I am going to achieve.' And the pleasure they took in achieving within their group and also achievement from moving up from a group was fantastic. It did motivate them. Whereas when they are in this school, they are in mixed ability classes they are not given that particular attention. The ones who can't read or write or who are academically challenged (...) they get bored, they want attention and they start to disrupt." Mrs Hempcott (SMT, ethnicity unknown)

Mrs Hempcott suggests that pupils had control over their membership to the different groups. In her enthusiasm for the system in her previous school she appears to overlook the fact that Met. in fact does use setting in some of its classes though perhaps the practices is not as widespread as she would like. Further, such is her commitment to setting that she seems to believe that simply because it appeared to be successful in one school that it would automatically work in another. She gives little consideration to the way in which the process is employed in relation, for example, to staff approaches to teaching and learning, availability of resources or varying opportunities for pupil feedback.

So far I have explained that membership of these set groups was based on pupil level ascertained through yearly tests. One member of staff, however, felt that teachers used these groups as a way of managing unwanted behaviour:

"(...) I don't know if there is a white, Black thing, I don't know - I think certainly the kids who walk around the corridor with, erm, like a swagger, the kids who like to dominate things and, the kids who do talk back to teachers, tend to be brought down sets. For two reasons though, *not necessarily because the teacher thinks they are less able* but because the teacher is not going to be able work and get the rest of the good kids the good grades if this one kid is messing about and they make the decision, which I actually think is quite sensible, to put that child into lower ability group so the kids who can do well are not prevented from doing so by this *clever child's behaviour*." Ms Sinclair (Support staff, white female) [emphasis added]

Although Ms Sinclair remarks that she does not know whether moving pupils down sets is determined by pupils' ethnicity, the very fact that she presents this as a query (especially since I had not raised the ethnicity as a subject for discussion) suggests that she feels ethnicity plays some role in determining outcomes in some areas of school life. While it is not expected that unwanted behaviour should remain ignored or be condoned, it is contradictory to the school's commitment to inclusion that the readily used solution is to move pupils down to lower ability groups with no indication here to specific strategies to target the poor behaviour. In the context of this research about Black pupils and academic success, it is notable that one of the behaviours she identifies "kids who walk around the corridor with (...) a swagger" was also discussed both as a potential barrier to achievement and in relation to Black students (Chapter 6). A further concern about is that such criteria for membership to various set groups remain implicit, that is they are not clear to pupils or their parents. In the context of national data that indicates that only 44.7%¹³ of Black pupils are achieving A* to C grades at GCSE, practices of the type described here where "clever children" are moved to groups based on judgements of behaviour rather than academic performance provides further indication as to how it is difficult for Black students to succeed.¹⁴ It seems highly probable that rather than eliminating the unwanted behaviour, this move will cause these pupils to feel frustrated, increase the levels of boredom and hence disruption to which Mrs Hempscott referred earlier thus making a mockery of the effectiveness of the setting by ability procedure in the way that she realises it.

The following observations by two members of staff reveal how some pupils feel about their membership to lower sets, once they recognised that the probability of success was restricted. It is probable that these feelings may be more pronounced where the reasons for their move have not been made clear to them or where it has been concerning their behaviour:

¹³ Against a national average of 54.9% (DfES, 2005a)

¹⁴ I already described at the start of this section how there is a maximum grade that can be achieved in lower ability groups.

"[Ms Buckley] says some pupils come to her saying why do they bother when put in Foundation groups if they're gonna fail anyway. Can't be put in Core/Intermediate group [Ms Buckley explained] because if fail will get a U. [It is] better to get some grade than no grade." Ms Buckley (Head of subject area, white female) Fieldnotes

Students were clearly disheartened by membership to a group that offered them no opportunity to pass, irrespective of how hard they worked. They therefore saw it as more profitable to be part of the core (intermediate) group where even if they did fail and receive a U, at least there was some initial scope for success¹⁵. The pupils want the opportunity to do well, regardless of test predictions but Ms Buckley construes this as too great a risk, preferring the security of knowing that in the foundation group, pupils will receive a grade, even if it has little value in wider society. The pupils are inadvertently persuaded to alter what they believed they could achieve initially in order to ensure a definite hit of a grade at GCSE, rather than follow their aspirations and miss achieving any grade. This is in line with Mrs Wright's earlier comment (see Chapter 4) that it was sometimes necessary to lower pupils' expectations of themselves. In this context is, therefore, unsurprising that Ms Hill reported the following feelings from pupils:

"(...) sometimes when I talk to them and they say, 'Oh well I'm in the low, the dunce group or the low group.' And I say, 'What does that mean? What do you mean by that?' 'Oh the most you can get is a D.'" Ms Hill (Support staff, Black female)

The combination of being unable to achieve even a pass at GCSE and the additional lowering of expectations seemed to engender an automatic sense of inferiority and failure in the pupils in the foundation group which, in part, contributed to the preference of some teachers to teach in mixed ability groups.

Mixed ability teaching groups

As may be now apparent, mixed ability groups were those which included pupils of a range of attainment levels, where no selection had taken place. Of the interviewed staff, two supported teaching in this way and, as with those who espoused setting by ability, were convinced of its benefits

"I think you learn better mixed - I've said this before - I think you learn better in all sorts of mixed grouping and the more mixed the group is....I don't know who invented that [setting by ability] I think they had that theory and put it out and now it's one they have to follow. This segregating people for any reason I've never known it to work. Let me think where it'll work [*puts forefinger to chin in pretence of concentrated thinking*]. Nope, nowhere! I think you learn so much from different people and if someone is on your group who happens to be - my definition - 'brighter than you' they can give you

¹⁵ The percentage of pupils receiving "ungraded" or "no passes" is also recorded in the performance tables alongside the schools A* to C and A* to G percentage achievements which may be a further incentive for Met. to ensure that pupils gain definite graded results even if they do not fall within the A* to C grade category: a complex game of risk and probability.

something. If someone's on your group who happens to be - again, my measurement - of low ability to you, they can still give you something because you might be bright academically, you might know all the equations, the formula for photosynthesis but you might not be able to draw a leaf. Now this person might be the best leaf drawer in all the world and they're sitting next you! (...) You can't build a house just with plumbers!"

Mr Bailey (teacher, Black male)

Mr Bailey's description of setting as a form of "segregation" invokes an image of apartheid and civil rights, of a process that is enforced, unjust and in which the recipients have no voice. In many ways this mirrors the same teacher-pupil power differential that I demonstrated was evident in Mr Brown's endorsement of setting by ability. Mr Bailey's perception of the advantages of mixed ability teaching clearly stems from how he feels it benefits the pupils and their enriched learning experience. He makes no mention of how it affects him as a teacher. This was a perspective also shared by Mrs Fitzpatrick:

"(...) it is better to have mixed ability and mixed things (...) there is a lot of richness where all students benefit because if you mix them according to ability the children may not access the work by reading it for themselves or not [be] able to express things in writing [but] they can hear what other students are saying. They could be directed to other things and it brings their self-confidence and achievement up. If you put them...select them and you put them into lower ability groups, er, they will...or for example on the basis on colour, whether it's eyes, hair or whatever, you will always let [it be] know[n] through whatever means, even if you didn't express it verbally, that you are different. We expect less from you because you have blond hair and blue eyes so you are [a] bimbo or, you know, you cannot strive or achieve certain levels. Otherwise if you are being taught on...whatever, whether it's [based on division by] sex, whether it's [based on the] colour of your skin, whether it's er, er your ability in a certain category, you begin to believe [in that and] you will not try to raise yourself." Mrs Fitzpatrick (teacher, white female)

It is clear that Mrs Fitzpatrick feels that dividing pupils by a random classification and assigning a value to that category leads to a false endorsement of that classification as valid. It is interesting that advocates of setting by ability were seemingly oblivious to or minimised the importance of pupil experience and the problems of such classification whereas teachers who favoured mixed ability groups did so because of the potential advantages that they felt sharing ideas and knowledge brought to the pupils regardless of their level of ability. However, as Mr Bailey now explains, grouping can occur even in mixed ability classrooms where the emphasis ought to be on effective differentiation and enabling pupils of varying levels to support one another:

"You say this is the work for the class. I'd like...out of this table I would like someone to appoint as, you know, as a speller, someone to...and they tend to fall into their roles. You could actually direct it, I'm not saying you don't but when you do, you don't do it in sort of a way that makes them think that this is the thick group and there's the clever group. You certainly don't put all the low ability pupils on table or something [pause] twee like that and put all the bright ones on another one. I think they know where they are [by ability level] (...) but I don't think you need to sort of ram it home in that sort of like 'education is the only way' sort of focus." Mr Bailey (teacher, Black male)

Preference for mixed ability groups versus setting did not necessarily predicate consensus in the way in which these groups were taught. Mr Bailey and Mrs Fitzpatrick expressed very different attitudes to differentiation that potentially would equate to different teaching experiences for their pupils. In some respects, Mrs Fitzpatrick's reasons for not being able to differentiate effectively (see below) are similar to the reasons cited by her colleagues who supported setting by ability as a teaching method:

"In the classes of thirty, with the huge ranges of ability, I will not pretend that I prepare every single lesson or that it is physically possible to prepare every single lesson with differentiated resources that would cater for all abilities. Very often you are teaching to the middle range and then filling in the gaps, if and as." Mrs Fitzpatrick (teacher, white female)

Teaching to mixed ability groups did not always mean, according to Mrs Fitzpatrick, that all pupils would be catered for. The challenge she argues is the size of the class that reduces the likelihood of suitable preparation for each lesson. Again her arguments are similar to those posed by advocates of setting by ability but are completely rejected by the following colleague:

"The worse course in the world is where you've got forty people in a room: half of them know what's going on, half of them haven't got a clue and *the course is pitched at the middle and no one gets any benefit out of it*. It's the same thing with a class of kids. I'm gonna be honest and grass on my colleagues. They don't differentiate that's for sure. I think... I strongly strongly believe that they should as often as possible. What people do, what people have done before is if you're gifted, if you're bright they'll give you more work they say 'You're clever - when you finish that go and do that as well, you see that work that we gave everyone...' Everyone is doing the same work, so when they say 'I've finished, miss!' 'Right, well when you've done that why don't you turn the next page and do that as well'. That isn't right! They're being punished for being bright!" Staff C

Staff C strongly believed that the needs of individual students are not being met satisfactorily due to the inadequate teaching methods of a number of Met. colleagues. Staff C was not alone in criticising colleagues about their teaching and disciplinary methods and I suggest that the willingness to share this frustration with me as a newcomer and an outsider reflects the extent of frustration by these particular members of staff. Particularly interesting from Staff C's comments is the view that the level of high quality teaching at Met. is poor:

"You know your kids, you are a teacher, you know what they're like - don't be giving them the same work! And a lot of teachers find it difficult they say 'wow I am teaching 37 people at the same time! It's impossible!' You're not in reality, you're not. It's simple but they don't understand how to do it. (...) Good teachers, they understand how to do it and they do it". Staff C

The view that "bright" students are not always catered for appropriately is substantiated by some of the academically successful students later in this chapter and gives some further indication about the ways in which academic success is managed within Met.

Informal markers of differential treatment

The following section examines how pupils are treated differently according to assumed intrinsic group differences. First, I discuss the roles of gender and ethnicity before studying how being construed as academically successful can automatically facilitate the development of positive relationships with staff. The section closes by revisiting the definition of academic success and explores how the dual position adopted by Met. might have negative repercussions for certain groups of students.

Gender and ethnicity

Two members of staff made explicit comments regarding colleagues and their treatment of pupils depending on their gender and/or ethnicity. According to the following staff member, the reason that boys did not achieve well was because many people were simply unaware of how to treat them appropriately.

- | | |
|---------|--|
| Staff E | "People don't know how to treat boys." |
| NR | "And how should they be treated?" |
| Staff E | "Harshly! Harshly! You got to...boys need...right see this is how old-fashioned I am, I am like an old Jamaican teacher. They need whacking [<i>hits table with hand for emphasis</i>] when necessary, they need to be kept busy [<i>hits table</i>], they need to be kept scared [<i>hits table again</i>], they need to be kept tired and hungry [<i>hits table</i>]. [<i>pause</i>] Well, scared is optional with your own kids but tired and hungry is important [<i>to</i>] keep them at it." |

This was not a typical view but I present it here to indicate the extreme personal views that individuals can bring with them into schools¹⁶ which seemingly go unchallenged. It is also worth recalling the annoyed responses of some of the (male) pupils in Chapter 3, to ways in which Staff E exercised his authority over uniform implementation. By invoking semblance to "an old Jamaican teacher", Staff E is rejecting the British education system and teachers for what he perceives as a way better steeped in tradition and discipline. It is worrying that a teacher holds such an extreme position and it was unclear how such views were managed by senior staff.

I asked all interviewed staff whether they felt that being academically successful (and following this less successful) influenced the way in which a student was treated by staff. One member of staff, I will call them Staff H here, to protect their anonymity, felt that differences in treatment were evident along lines of gender and ethnicity:

¹⁶ Of course this is not limited to teaching. Individuals bring aspects of their beliefs and personal views into all professions.

"You see some people, you see them...more obvious things. You see them treat boys and girls differently. You see them treat different ethnic groups differently. People do that, it's almost human nature...You know not to be [like that]. You see it everywhere. You should see it less in schools because teachers are supposed to be aware, you know what I mean, they are supposed to be more aware."

The "some people" being referred to here are teachers and it is clear that the treatment being referred to here is not positive. Staff E's earlier belief about the biological differences between girls and boys provides an example of how treatment can be varied according to gendered perspectives. However, Staff H also states that differential treatment was extended to various ethnic groups, suggesting a belief in intrinsic differences between them that was demonstrated through racist terminology:

"There are teachers in this school that refer to certain groups as, er, 'coloureds' [pause] and some people would think 'well it doesn't matter they're not going to be using their education for anything other than manual labour' (...)" Staff H

'Coloured' is generally thought of as a derogatory term¹⁷ usually directed at Black groups because of their skin colour and is especially inappropriate within an educational environment. Negative comments of this nature were made to Staff H, who is Black, in a way that suggests a naivety on the part of the perpetrator and a lack of engagement and comfort with individuals from varying cultural backgrounds.

"(...) that's the worse thing because 'cos then they think it's to some part acceptable. I mean you wouldn't get that stuff said to you unless they thought...it's almost like you know 'With all due respect, I know that you are one of them but (...)' It's that sort of thing. They're not being nasty to me. They're not expecting a backlash from it. They're expecting me to sort of say 'oh yes', you know."

This is not blatant "skinhead" racism (Hall, 2002) that can be easily identified and perhaps contained. This is a more sophisticated form of racism, where the owner that sees it as acceptable to enter into a conversation with a Black member of staff using this language. This is the 'friendly racism' that says 'you're alright, you're not like the rest'; a racism that does not consider itself racist. As Staff H, points out "they're not being nasty" but the inherent naivety does not rid the language of its racist content, a content which is exacerbated by the perceived relationship between "coloureds" not being expected to amount to much and their anticipated future in "manual labour". Such views are clearly likely to serve as the basis for low expectations of the extent to which Black pupils, who have been classified in this way, are deemed able to achieve and as I already explained in the Literature Review, low teacher expectations are one of

¹⁷ For example, in the closing submission to part 1 of the Inquiry into the death of Black teenager Stephen Lawrence, the CRE found the "continued use" of inappropriate language such as the word "coloured" to describe Black people as "indicative of the racist culture of the Metropolitan Police Force" (Commission for Racial Equality, 1998)

the key factors in contributing to the low attainment of Black pupils. Staff H summarises this well:

"If you had low expectations of a pupil, it's going be hard for them to achieve. If you aim low then I suggest you are gonna get low. (...) If you already think *when a person walks into your class* that this person is gonna end up in the gutter then all that stuff about knowing your kids and learning, [about] where they have been and getting that feeling of achievement, where you have got them to exceed that place, you know... what has been predicted for them [is] that *they are gonna end up in the gutter* (...) *It's way below their actual potential and you think you've done a good job* therefore you're gonna do the same thing next year and the year after." Staff H [emphasis added]

In light of such evidence it is apparent that achieving academically is not easy for Black students. However, as the following remark from the headteacher Mrs Edwards reveals, willingness to recognise the existence and impact of racism and discriminatory attitudes was poor and indeed seen as tangential to the realities of those pupils really committed to educational success:

"Also this thing that you know 'oh that teacher's racist' or 'that teacher doesn't like Black boys'. That is nonsense! I wouldn't say that you know, yes people could give me six case studies of it and they are genuine but you know, it's the minority, it's not the majority. And if, as I say to the parents, if your child wants to achieve, they will achieve here. What happens is that some of the Black boys are too easily distracted from learning and they come into school and learning does not feature on their agenda." Mrs Edwards (headteacher)

While Mrs Edwards accepts the existence of racism she minimises its relevance and even presence within the school. Interestingly, in her example she refers only to Black boys rather than to any other group, which fits into wider societal discourse which locates Black boys as problematic. I am not taking the position that Black students (here Black boys) are infallible but I do question the ways in which they as a group, their dress and demeanour become reconstituted as challenging, as objects of fear and how this affects their subsequent treatment. Additionally, I am curious about and concerned by the ways in which latent personal views and stereotypes become intertwined with the pressures of schooling, resulting in the sanctioning of a culture of low expectations for particular ethnic groups. While Mrs Edwards places achievement at the forefront of her educational policies (see above) her statement "if your children wants to achieve, they will achieve here" firmly places any lack of progress in learning with Black boys in a way that suggests that it is the very culmination of their ethnicity and gender that predisposes *them* to being "easily distracted from learning". Her analysis is similar to Sewell's (2000c) tenuous argument that simplistically situates Black boys as inherently demotivated and anti-school.

Academically successful and less successful students

It is reasonable to argue that teacher treatment of successful and less successful students will increase under the type of stressful and challenging teaching conditions that exist at schools such as Metropolitan High (see Chapter 8 for further discussion of this subject) which is exactly what the evidence suggests:

"I mean sometimes, erm, staff work under very stressful conditions and, erm, they probably will respond to a child who they know is focused academically who wants that extra help, who has been sort of inquiring, wanting to do something extra compared to someone who has just ended up in a fight and is disrupting the lesson." Mrs Davidson (Head of Year group white female)

While Mrs Davidson originally attempted to avoid mentioning academically successful students when I asked whether they are treated differently from less successful students, she nonetheless reveals an underlying assumption of a relationship between academic performance and behaviour in a way that corroborates Mr Sanderson's earlier suggestion that the system rewards the "kids who follow the rules" (see page 133). Here, the implication is that "focused academic" students are usually well behaved reflecting belief in a direct association between less academic students and bad behaviour. In the earlier chapter on Dress and Demeanour I observed that some pupils were not regarded as receptive, or were perceived as a challenge and a threat simply because of their outward manner and dress. These students were considered less likely to be academically successful or, using Mrs Davidson's words may be regarded as less focused academically. She also makes the assumption that pupils who have just ended up "in a fight" or who have been disruptive are automatically less interested in school work although their mere presence at school may suggest some a desire to learn. Either way, it is clear that these are not the type of ideal students who are going to be recipients of praise (Mr Sanderson, above) and positive teacher attention. While such lack of positive reinforcement from staff cannot be said to *cause* disruptive or unwanted pupil behaviour, it is feasible that this unwanted pupil behaviour may not improve if they are treated differently from their successful counterparts and if that difference includes less positive teacher attention. To be defined as academically successful automatically appears to have repercussions on the assumptions teachers make about the other characteristics, including the morality, of these students, judgements which were borne out in visible ways both in and outside of the classroom:

"Say one of those [academically successful] pupils got involved in a situation then from the very onset you would trust that student, you would trust what they say - so to trust your pupils is a big thing and that trust extends to if there is a piece of work that they need to do in the library with some students you would say, 'Yeah fine, you got to be in the library? See you in fifteen minutes'. Other students you would say 'sorry, no you stay in here'. So they are treated differently. Often it can be say if you got a rowdy boy who is disruptive in the lesson, when his hand goes up for help, sometimes it is very difficult to go and help him but then the person that's sat across the room if they are on task,

hard-working it is a pleasure to go and help them and spend five minutes talking with them, you know, *it comes down to your relationships at the end of the day* but is based around who do you trust or who don't you trust and do you actually enjoy spending time with that person because you can have a conversation or when you speak to most students it ends up in confrontation. So you shouldn't have favourites but sometimes it's hard not to." Mr Brown (teacher, white male) [emphasis added]

It is clear from Mr Brown's admission is that academically successful students are advantaged in relation to their less successful peers. To be consigned to the category of less successful means a reduction in the full range of benefits related to having a good character reference, available to their successful counterparts. Less successful students are disadvantaged "from the very onset" in a range of situations that involve misunderstandings or disagreements as well as those directly related to academic work. The implication of this in understanding how Black pupils (especially it would appear, Black male students) become academically successful is significant. I have already presented evidence (Chapter 6) that indicates that they were unlikely to be perceived as successful because of their outward appearance and demeanour. To further employ Mr Brown's analysis would imply that these Black students (who have been situated as less successful) are less likely to enjoy the positive attributions about their behaviour traditionally assigned to academically successful students and as a result be less likely to establish positive relationships with staff. The importance assigned to such relationships is indisputably conveyed by Brown's comment: "it all comes down to your relationships at the end of the day."

His example differs from Mrs Davidson's because while her view is based on a pupil who is currently disruptive, Mr Brown's "rowdy boy" appears able to settle enough at times to engage in classroom work. Yet despite this, it is the fact that this boy was disruptive in the first place that affects Mr Brown's subsequent reaction so that *even when* this boy *is* focused, memories of the disruptive behaviour reduce the likelihood that this pupil will receive his help in his academic work and increases the likelihood that this pupil will not achieve well at school. This probability of not doing well is further compounded by the fact that, as I will show next, that pupils constructed as less academically successful were also more likely to be channelled into lower status subject areas.

All success is successful

While much teacher attention was channelled towards the achievement of A* to Cs and ensuring that the "right" students fulfilled this potential, this did not mean that less academic students could not also share in achievement for they had the opportunity to succeed in other areas of the curriculum:

"But in this school effort is ... the ideology of a lot of the teachers is not to just award praise to kids who are academically able I mean there is a lot of pressure from the

teachers as well to reward other things like effort, you know, *sort of Citizenship type things you know, reliability, being nice to other people, always helping out.* That is quite a high priority here. The school does like to recognise that." Mr Sanderson (teacher, white male) [emphasis added]

As I mentioned above, this commitment to ensure that these areas of the pastoral curriculum are also rewarded is reflected in Met's summary assessment guidelines. There were Pastoral achievement assemblies and Gifted and Talented¹⁸ students were identified and monitored in both pastoral and curriculum areas. So this complements staff opinion that success can be more than just academic. This in itself is not problematic but I have shown that *who* is likely to succeed is compounded by a number of extraneous factors (as shown in Figure 7.1). According to some teacher reports, academically successful students are unlikely to subscribe to certain ethnicised subcultures and students that did were feared and considered unreceptive to teaching and learning. In Chapter 6, I also argued that some female members of staff would exercise extra surveillance of these pupils as a result their fear of them which in turn might increase the possibility of conflict between staff and these pupils. It is also possible that if these students were constructed as less than ideal they would be unlikely to be treated as academically successful. However, since this was a school that encouraged all forms of success, it is plausible that these pupils were encouraged to achieve in less high status areas of the curriculum or school life. Anyone could be successful but some were more likely to achieve success in particular parts of the curriculum than others. This is demonstrated in the following extract from the interview with the deputy head teacher, who also happened to be responsible for the school's inclusion and equal opportunities policies. I have just asked him how he describes academic success:

"It depends on the student; I think it depends on the individual. You have in any school, erm, students who are, you know, I suppose you could say they are academic - *the old fashioned idea of what academic means - they are able to sort of pass exams very well.* You also have other students who are very talented - especially at Met I think they are amazingly, you know, talented kids in this school. I think that can also be considered as an academic er thing, *like Music or Sports* or whatever it might be, all these things are now seen, I think, on a sort of level playing field. So it's not just '*oh you're good at Maths, you're good at English*' I think you celebrate the whole lot. I don't think you can in any school unless it is a selective school talk really talk only about academic achievement because there are so many other achievements that happen and I wouldn't want to pull out the academic things from everything else that the school does."

Mr Foster (SMT, white male)

This extract represents the two ways in which many of the interviewed staff at Metropolitan High School constructed success. It is important here, in the context of teacher treatment because it shows something of the differing levels of academic acceptability for different students. While

¹⁸ Despite this focus, a conversation overheard in the staffroom between two members revealed a continued drive from the headteacher to select pupils for Gifted and Talented only from Year 9 as opposed to, as one of the teachers complained, from Year 7. This again prioritises achievement at a crucial stage in the pupils' school career in line with Gillborn & Youdell's (2000) 'A to C economy'.

academic success was within the reach of pupils of the appropriate social class, from the right family background and for those who have been predicted success from their test results, not all pupils meet these criteria. Further it was evident, according to staff reports, that few pupils were likely to succeed academically because the distribution of the intake bands 'proved' that some are going to succeed and others fail. However, this was a school with a staff who wanted their pupils to do well, therefore (academic) success was reconstructed, for the pupils who were not predicted or thought able to achieve A* to C grades, to include achievements in *all* spheres of the school curriculum (irrespective of status), meaning that the gates of success were open to all. This meant that different expectations were placed on different pupils according to the grades they were predicted and their behaviour.

An additional consideration expressed by Mr Foster indicates that as a genuinely comprehensive school, Met. had little choice but to define success in these broad terms unlike selective schools whose advantageous position allowed them to choose their pupils and therefore restrict their definition of success to more conventional terms. By situating selective schools as "old-fashioned" in their definition, he is able to portray them as naïve, out of touch and simply inaccurate in their interpretation of current educational debates and admissions policies, unlike up-to-date Metropolitan High which has amended its position to take account of its contemporary client group.

I believe that Mr Foster's opinion is also influenced by his position as line manager for inclusion. While the inclusion document, which he wrote, provides no clear definition of inclusion it does outline Metropolitan's goal to "reduce the risk of disaffection, truancy and the need for fixed term and permanent exclusion" through a range of strategies, some of which offer pupils the opportunity to remain engaged with school through a flexible curriculum and extra-curricular activities. Therefore, whether or not pupils were defined as academically successful, Metropolitan strove to offer opportunities for learning and development for all but seems unaware of the implicit hierarchical divisions which lay behind this alleged inclusive agenda:

"I think this school is actually very very good at erm working with children of all abilities and celebrating what they do well, well. We see students as individuals with individual needs and see students that can achieve their full potential and that's what counts. It's not whether they get an A star and sort of walk away from here very sort of like so called academically gifted or whatever, you know. The important thing is that they leave school with the best qualifications, the best experiences and so on, that they can possibly get. And I think this school is still working towards it but it's getting there and I think this underpins...equal opportunities defines what we do at this school. I thoroughly believe that." Mr Foster (Deputy headteacher, white male)

Mr Foster does not consider that achievement in academic subjects or the acquisition of A stars within the reach of, or even relevant to *all* students as long as they "can achieve their full potential". Within the wider education system, however, it is English and Mathematics (to which

he made earlier reference) that are recognised as high status subjects. As mentioned previously, it is pupils' achievement in these subjects¹⁹ that at the time of this research are recorded in yearly performance tables and it is passes in these subjects which are requested by a number of further education institutions and employers. Their importance is also conveyed by their being positioned as the first subjects in the National Curriculum handbooks and their title of being "core" subjects (QCA & DfES, 1999d, e). By comparison, Music and Sports that he proffers as equal worth hold relatively little wider status beyond his personal mindset. I reported above the tense exchange between Mr Condon and the member of the SMT as they sought ways to increase the numbers of those achieving A star to C grades in Maths. Clearly, staff do desire and strive to obtain academic success in these socio-political terms. However, in his drive to be inclusive, Mr Foster accepts achievement in additional arenas of school life with the inclusive sentiment that sufficient progress here can also be regarded a success. His insistence on recognising the individuality of pupils directly contradicts Ms Hill's earlier need (Chapter 6, p.87) to regard students as an homogenous, characterless group. It also contradicts his own later response to my question asking for an example of the types of achievements that Metropolitan also considered important:

"Like I say, the talented things; the extracurricular things. *We've got amazingly talented athletes at this school, we have very talented rappers.* We have lots of things that the pupils do which if you don't dig deep enough you don't actually see." Mr Foster (Deputy headteacher) [emphasis added]

The extracurricular talents that he insists deserve greater recognition are the same activities (music and sport) into which Black students (and the wider Black population) have been encouraged based on stereotypical perceptions of an ethnicised innate aptitude in these areas. It also reflects a historically long and persistent concern of many Black parents, that their children are being restricted from achieving in mainstream subjects as a result of their being channelled into these "extracurricular things". His desire to value all forms of achievement means that even those who are achieving in non-traditional areas are likely to be applauded and uncritically encouraged. Acceptance of achievement in these areas, in conjunction with the notion that ability was fixed and not all pupils were expected to achieve in academic areas of the curriculum, limits the likelihood that these pupils will be expected to be successful in other, higher status subject areas especially if the pupil does not readily fit into the template of the academically successful student (Fig 7.1). His perspective is rejected by Ms Taylor (PE, Black female) who opines that focusing on these non-academic activities in fact directly contributes to an attitude of academic failure amongst Black students and therefore she rejects their place in the attainment of any long term success:

¹⁹ Science is also recorded.

"(...) they can have a balance of the two [associated street culture pursuits²⁰ and education] but when they are in school the learning comes first (...) 'cos I think the kids have got a lot of talent and we could maybe celebrate that in different ways maybe putting on talent shows, you know, different things that they can celebrate to show that as a school we *do* appreciate where they are coming from but *that isn't gonna get them a job at the end of the day or, you know, that isn't gonna get them to university or ultimately to a job. They need to have an education.*" Ms Taylor (teacher) [emphasis added]

Ms Taylor's remark acts as a striking comparison with Mr Foster's since she challenges the worth of the pursuits that he attempts to embrace and celebrate in the name of inclusion. While it is impossible to draw any overarching conclusions, since the comments are from only two members of staff, it is also notable that Mr Foster and Ms Taylor are also of different ethnic groups and gender. It is plausible that Mr Foster is attempting to be inclusive not only in relation to the school policies but also by liberally aspiring to attach value to all pupils irrespective of ethnic group. His insistence that he sees pupils as "individuals" and his commitment to treating *all* talents as significant unfortunately blinds him to the prejudices implicit in his comments which are founded on generalised and stereotypical perceptions of an intrinsic ethnic group ability. This is especially interesting and depressing due to his repeated recommendation that I focus the topic of my research in relation to gender and ethnicity in line with the school's objectives of analysing achievement data by these same variables:

"...we are looking at these things [achievement] based on things like gender and ethnicity. I think it is very important to see if there are particular groups of kids who are underachieving because if there are we need to know why." Mr Foster (SMT)

While analysing school data to identify possible gender and ethnic group differences is important to help schools personalise learning and target resources and support appropriately, Foster's subjective interpretations of the extent of ethnicised abilities and his restricted construction of inclusion remains worryingly isolated from a genuine commitment to understand how "underachievement" might be challenged. Further, his misinterpretation of inclusion and equal opportunities is likely to create an environment where pupils' lower levels of achievement in some subject areas are accepted as given and it is likely that other staff members, who share his particular definition of academic success, will accept these different standards of achievement in the same way.

²⁰ Interest in music (though only hip hop was mentioned) and being with peers. See Chapter 2 for further details of how Ms Taylor defines street culture and its effects on schooling.

Pupils

"It [being academically successful] means that they think you can be more able than other students (...) [it means] being able to do almost anything in their eyes." Daniel Clark (white, Year 10)

Academically successful pupils felt that they were treated differently on account of their academic status in relation to the work they were given and the way in which discipline was implemented. Often they drew comparisons with the treatment of less academic pupils who usually received worse treatment in both these areas.

Work.

Classes which were set by ability provided the most obvious example of an arena where teachers differentiated the way they treated pupils since each class received work targeted at their attainment level. I already mentioned, in the staff section, how membership of the lower group stimulated feelings of inadequacy amongst pupils. Of the three pupils who mentioned setting, one highlighted differences in teacher treatment of pupils even within the high ability group:

"In our class, we're supposed to be the higher class but we are different people on different levels of work: some are on higher, some intermediate and some are foundation. So he tends to spend more time with the higher people, which I see he like spends more time explaining to them and with the foundation people he just like tells them to do stuff - look in the book and they just do it." Nicole Adams (Black Other, Year 11)

Despite being an academically successful student in the extension group, Nicole is aware of the subdivisions that take place by ability within this particular class and the fact that teacher attention is distributed in favour of those who are most likely to obtain the highest grades. She gives the impression that there was a better quality of interaction with the "higher people" and reciprocal discussion to ascertain that they understand the work that they have been given. By comparison interaction with pupils set lower level (foundation) work in this high ability group is not only minimal but appears devoid of any verbal input or concern. They are portrayed as flat and robot-like, only responding to instruction and not likely to be stimulated by any degree of (inter)active learning. It is notable that Nicole observes this difference even amongst pupils in the extension (highest) class since it implies that the distinction in treatment between those in the highest and lowest (core) group is even more pronounced.

Just over a third of the twenty-five pupils interviewed felt that those who are academically successful receive more teacher attention. Sometimes this was reflected by the fact that they are simply given further or more difficult work or because they received greater encouragement than less successful peers:

"I think teachers tend to encourage you much more. Like they tell you 'you can do it' or they have more faith in you and they tend to say it to you but not up front just like... sometimes they even give you more time or less time because they know you can get on with it. They give you more time because they want to help you more, like to get ahead. I think they do act differently towards academically successful pupils. (...) Some teachers tend to help more 'cos they feel like those pupils are going to succeed (...) At the same time they might not help those people who are succeeding because they know they can get on with the work (...)." Nicole Adams (Year 11, Black Other)

Nicole conveys the impression that teachers are sensitive to the needs of academically successful students, giving them more or less time and support according to the demands of the particular task or exercise. There is a sense that teachers are more likely to invest their time and energy into students who have been defined as academically successful. This is reiterated by the way in which they are perceived to treat students who were not as able academically:

"I've seen ... a lot of cases teachers just... they know there's always the good ones and there's the bad ones. They just reject the bad ones, like they don't really care anymore. They'll give up on them and concentrate all their efforts on the ones they know will get the grades." Samuel Owusu (Year 11, Black African)

As with the teacher comments above, it can be seen that good has become equated with successful and bad with less successful. It was not clear whether Samuel (or indeed any of the other pupils) share this view or are simply reflecting the association that they observed had been made by staff. The perceived relationship between academic performance and behaviour is examined further in the section on Discipline.

While some students felt that teachers did initially attempt to support less academic students, they felt that staff were of the opinion that it was easier to work with those pupils who were seen to benefit demonstratively from their input. By comparison, less academically successful students required a significant amount of teacher time, at the end of which success was not guaranteed, unlike their counterparts who already had been defined or predicted success. Such divisions were compounded by the view that staff were seen to regard and treat less academic peers as ignorant and unable to grasp concepts quickly:

"The people in the foundation class for Maths, they told me that their teacher was like patronising him. He was like [*assumes deeper tone*] 'do you know what a calculator is?' Or things like that, sarcastic comments like that or 'Do you know what to do with it?' Stuff like that. Things that you should know, that he knows and he asks do you know about that. It makes you feel stupid." Nicole Adams (Year 11, Black Other)

By contrast academically successful students were viewed as competent and intelligent enough to be left to complete work independently. Some of the interviewed pupils were unhappy about this since it meant that exercises might not be explained to them in sufficient detail and it forced

them to seek alternative ways of eliciting information since they were usually uncomfortable asking for help:

"Its weird, because you'd think, yeah, like the better the student the more the teacher would concentrate on them or something like that but its sort of backwards, because if you're a good student, then the teachers automatically think you're able to do stuff and that you don't really need explaining and they'll give you the work and they'll explain it to the whole class but they'll expect *you* to understand it and not need a second helping or something (...) sometimes that's bad because like some people like me and my friend, yeah, we don't like to ask for help. I don't know why - I guess I get embarrassed (...) I'll be there and I'll try to understand the work and I won't...and the teacher will be going around the class to all the other students....and so you won't do as well as you could of in that certain piece of work." Michelle Gregory (Year 9, Black British) [emphasis in original]

Discipline

According to the pupils interviewed, to be identified as academically successful seemed to imbue students with a range of additional positive characteristics that increased their standing amongst some members of staff. These pupils recognised that academic success was usually equated with good behaviour which in turn implied that the student was reliable and trustworthy. For one student this was exemplified by being asked to run errands once he had completed his assigned work:

"If you finish your work, they go and make you do photocopying which is annoying and they'll make you do things that they haven't done [such as] doing favours for them, like notes and stuff."
Daniel Clark (white, Year 10)

Sending Daniel on errands not only indicates that he is seen as a responsible student but shows that he is perceived as competent enough to be able to carry out the task satisfactorily. The photocopying machines that I came across in the school also required access codes which were only held by teachers, which it is fair to assume that Daniel was given, reflecting a further level of confidence in his discretion not to divulge the details of the codes with other students.

According to student reports, teachers also tended to be less suspicious about the motives or behaviour of successful pupils which meant that they were granted a leniency in some areas where less successful students were not.

"Like if somebody [who] is not successful, erm, does not do their homework they get in trouble but the good person doesn't do their home work its like, 'oh you can bring it in tomorrow'."
Nadine Taylor (Year 10, Black Caribbean)

Implicit in granting academically successful students extra time to complete their work is that they must have genuine reasons for not handing it in. According to Nadine, teachers regard the "good person" as able and willing to complete the homework but similar judgement is not afforded the less successful student who is assumed to be making excuses and is subsequently

punished. In fact it is possible that both sets of student found the work difficult and simply required more time to complete it or, both were sought to avoid doing it. Again, it is the unquestioning causal link that staff make about different sets of students that I am continuing to highlight as having inequitable consequences. The judgement that they possessed additional desirable qualities also often allowed successful pupils to escape minor reprimands in the classroom:

"[Less successful students get treated] like they're bad, like every little thing that person does, they get picked on. Like if they come into the classroom late it's like a big thing, if like a good person comes in late, it's like 'why were you late?' and you get to sit down and do your work." Nadine Taylor (Year 10, Black Caribbean)

By simply asking "why were you late?" allows the exchange of a conversation not overly steeped in judgement. It very simply offers the student the opportunity to explain their side of the story in a way that suggests the teacher is ready to regard their lateness as warranted. Successful students are allowed a voice compared to their less successful peers who are perceived to be immediately at fault and therefore not granted the same opportunity to explain themselves. While the perceived good behaviour of successful students offers them an advantage in these types of situations, the injustice in the difference in treatment rarely goes go unnoticed by the students themselves:

"I've seen two different students: the good one and the bad one. A teacher must have been talking, explaining the work and the bad one must have asked a question but not put his hand up and he shouted out like 'what you doing? It's rude blah, blah, blah.' And the good one done [*sic*] exactly the same thing but he got answered. There's no...I don't see where the boundaries are. You can't just do that and then they don't expect you just to get up and then be angry!" Samuel Owusu (Year 11, Black African)

Samuel is clearly annoyed by what he understandably interprets as a lack of clarity in the way that these reprimands are distributed. His example is particularly pertinent to demonstrating how even if students are engaged in constructive, classroom-relevant activity, they can be disadvantaged simply because they have already been identified as less successful or bad. The implication is that teachers use these markers of less successful-bad, academically successful-good as the basis for understanding and judging the behaviour of students on a daily basis.

Teachers also demonstrated a desire to protect academically successful students from situations where their educational performance might be hindered. This was seen, for example, in their attempts to regulate classroom relationships.

"Yeah 'cos teachers will help them [academically successful students], like tell them to like move away from the students who are disruptive because they wouldn't want the disruptive students to bring them down as well."

Tamika Amiaka (Year 10, Black Caribbean)

Academically successful students are an investment. They represent the means through which the school can situate itself as effective and as having status to wider society and government. Tamika's comment clearly reflects the importance of this status as teachers work to ensure that they are not distracted by others from attaining their academic credentials. Evidence of this is reflected in the way in which they are given the benefit of the doubt in situations where less successful students are automatically judged to be at fault. Further, it supports the following comment from Year 9 student Chantelle Fenton who argues that in situations where there had been serious breaches²¹ of school rules, successful students were more likely to be severely reprimanded than less successful counterparts:

- | | |
|------------------|--|
| Chantelle Fenton | (Year 9, Black Caribbean)" I was talking once in Humanities and... because this boy had my pen? And the teacher sent a letter home saying I was being disruptive." |
| NR | "(...) Do you think she would have written the letter if you were not academically successful?" |
| Chantelle | "No 'cos I asked most of the people who aren't academic if they got a letter home for doing these things and they didn't." |

Teachers seem unwilling to tolerate extreme forms of perceived bad behaviour from successful students as though eager to eradicate out lest it escalate and affect the probability of their future success. Teachers protect those students who look like a good investment for the school:

- | | |
|--------------|--|
| Daniel Clark | (white, Year 10) "If you [as an academically successful student] do something wrong then it will be picked up on quite easily than somebody who is less academically successful it would be less picked up on. Let's say you have done something bad like punched a teacher or something, you would get excluded worse than if you were less academically successful." |
| NR | "Why do you think that is?" |
| Daniel | " <i>They're not meant to be that way.</i> They want more academically successful people in their school. More punishment is to like scare them 'cos if they were less academically successful I think it wouldn't scare them as much because they would just go and do it again which is weird but they don't know that, I don't think. I don't think teachers do know that or the headteacher... (...)" [emphasis added] |

Academically successful students are perceived as naturally well behaved with any undesirable behaviour to be dealt with swiftly and stringently. I suggest that the more severe and out of character the incident and the more academically ideal the student, the punishment is likely to

²¹ Note that I am arguing that staff excused minor mishaps but severely reprimanded for more serious misdemeanours which are considered out of character and a possible threat to pupils' predicted academic performance.

be severe. It is a situation of which Daniel felt teachers and even the headteacher were not aware.

Discussion

"The thing that overcomes the vagaries of the [prediction] system is the teacher should be able to have a good understanding of their pupil." Mr Bailey (teacher, Black male)

In the preceding chapters I show how staff constructions of academic success extends beyond pupils' classroom work and often includes subjective judgements about social class, family background and circumstance and particular ethnicised pupil identities (see Fig 7.1). In this chapter, I argue that being defined as academically successful or unsuccessful acts as a fixed and self-fulfilling prophecy as teacher treatment is tailored accordingly.

Advantages of appropriating the correct pupil identity

Those seen to display the appropriate ideal student identity are automatically trusted more and therefore privy to more opportunities where their trustworthiness can be increasingly proved and reinforced. Academically successful students are often described as mature and able to engage in a depth of conversation that differentiated them from less successful peers. However, it is also true that due to their status, staff are more inclined to actually grant them the space to voice their opinions. The mere fact of being positioned as academically successful facilitates and increases these students' position of advantage within the school which in turn is reinforced by various school practices. For example, I explained how setting by ability was used as a way of regulating undesirable behaviour that was likely to disadvantage Black students and see their opportunities for success restricted (see also earlier ethnographic work by Wright 1986, Mac an Ghail 1988 that reveals similar findings). It is also likely that other school-based programmes and interventions aimed at supporting successful pupils only serve to accentuate differences in pupils seen as high status (academically successful students) and low status (less successful students) and their subsequent treatment and ultimately have disastrous consequences for Black pupils who do not fit the academic ideal. This was evident in the recent government Gifted and Talented initiative, set up as part of the Excellence in Cities programme (DfEE, 1999f) which initially received criticism for attracting primarily white middle-class female students (Owen, 2002; Kendall, Rutt & Schagen, 2005), who can be identified as more likely to be academically successful, rather than those from 'disadvantaged backgrounds' at which it was originally aimed²². Yet this remains an unsurprising finding in view of the pressures on schools to continually achieve the highest grades (see Gillborn & Youdell, 2000) and in light of evidence

²² A recent evaluation of the Excellence in Cities programme has suggested that it is benefiting disadvantaged schools (and therefore pupils) compared with more advantaged ones though it is not clear whether this is simply due to the deliberate allocation of extra resources to these disadvantaged schools (Machin, McNally & Meghir, 2005).

from the current research that shows that it is these students who are seen to fit the profile of ideal and therefore allowed most opportunity for academic success.

Disadvantages of not fulfilling the ideal learner identity

Less successful students are not given the same chances to account for or explain their behaviour since they were often already deemed guilty by virtue of their lesser academic status. Teachers implied that there was a close relationship between academic performance and behaviour so much so that less successful students might be denied help with their academic work because of earlier misbehaviour. Even when engaging in similar behaviour as their successful peers, less successful students were likely to be reprimanded, supporting Keddie's (1981:140) observation that:

"Equal rights are not granted to all pupils since the 'same' behaviour may have different meanings attributed to it, depending on the normal status of the pupil."

In this way it seems that scope for academic success become increasingly restricted once a pupil presents with and/or is perceived to possess the 'wrong' identity. Returning again to the table at the beginning of this chapter, it is clear that Black pupils are also likely to be disadvantaged in this context because of their lack of fit with the ideal and, as the school's own figures on permanent exclusions would suggest. The successful students interviewed for this research expressed feelings of injustice and frustration at the ways in which discipline was enforced at Met., sentiments that undisputedly would have been exacerbated if they had been situated as not succeeding academically.

The importance of teacher-pupil relationships

Central, to overcoming some of the variances which arose through predictions, testing and markers of success was the role of a teacher's knowledge of their pupil (see introductory quotation). Yet as I have demonstrated, teachers did *not* reflect understanding of their pupils but based their perceptions on generalised stereotypes that reduced pupils to a crude successful-good or less successful-bad dichotomy. The relationships that staff had with these sets of pupils were defined by this dichotomy and further negatively reinforced and indeed complicated by students actively opting out of the relationship if they felt they had been treated unfairly. These reductionist discourses, where pupils were seen as able or not able, good or bad, seemed to be attached to pupils early in their secondary school when attainment profiles were received and appeared to follow the pupils throughout their school lives. There seemed to be little opportunity to influence or change the profile and staff rarely questioned the validity of their perceptions. The only teacher reported not to subscribe to fixed judgements about his pupils was described, by a member of the support staff as an effective teacher, who was able to establish positive relationships with pupils:

"There's one particular teacher they love. They love his lessons and they are really intrigued at his lessons and these boys I know they are [usually] being constantly excluded. And I went to him and said what is it about you (...) and he said, '*all I can put it down to is that every lesson they come to they start afresh, they are not pain in the arse Peter that messed up my lesson last week. [It's] oh hi Pete, nice to see you, sit down.*' And he starts every lesson fresh with them fresh and he tries not to bring on what they did last week or the week before into ... Every lesson is new; every lesson is fresh and those kids are welcomed to be part of that and then if something goes wrong then he'll deal with it. And they do achieve...and there's kids who don't achieve well in other subjects and they really achieve in this and they really like it (...) They had respect, they enjoyed his teaching, therefore they enjoyed the subject and then they wanted to achieve and they wrote realms and did what ever they could (...) His teaching... he's strict, he's interesting but every subject he'll started afresh and a lot of teachers they'll walk in, they'll see the face and know it's trouble and they'll say, 'Get out!' And that does happen and yet if they are prepared to disrupt academically able kids then that's something else they'll have to address isn't it (...)?" Ms Bellingham (support staff, white female) [emphasis added]

The attitude of the teacher described by Ms Bellingham contrasts sharply with Mr Brown's earlier reluctance to offer support to a boy who had previously been "rowdy" yet who was now engaged in relevant classroom activity. The response of the pupils in the above extract is glaring, they are "intrigued", they "enjoy" and "love" the lessons simply because (and it may not be the only factor, since he is also described as strict) he "starts every lesson fresh with them". In the context of the data presented so far, this might be understood as meaning that *all* pupils have similar opportunities to make their voice heard and share in classroom activity. The way in which teachers' structured and delivered their teaching is one of the factors that pupils identified as needing to change to improve academic performance and is considered in the following chapter.

I began this research in a bid to explore how some Black students become categorised as academically successful and how they are able to achieve in the school context in light of the continuing headlines of Black failure, underachievement and disadvantage (see Chapters 1 & 2). Of course, working hard and being suitably motivated are important but what I have demonstrated through the interviews with and observations of both staff and pupils at Metropolitan High school is that some pupils are *expected* to naturally be more successful than others. A different set of attributions are made to many Black students, in particular Black male students, from working class environments, whose dress and/or comportment is deemed too Americanised. These students are feared and surveyed. Athletics and rapping becomes acceptable for these students in the name of "inclusion". While Met. is genuinely concerned about achievement by gender and ethnicity personalised accounts and perspectives, while quite distinct in the evidence that I have presented here, are absent from their debate and analysis. In other words, the influence of the teacher on the teaching and learning process is surprisingly absent. This partly contributes to the way in which Mrs Edwards is able to dismiss racism as a

salient feature of school life. I am not insisting that staff at Met. are racist but that there is perhaps a simplistic and extreme conception of racism that ignores the impact of nuanced stereotypes and beliefs and the way in which they present within the school environment. Under particular conditions, where staff are obliged to subscribe to achievement in terms of A stars to Cs and where they are feeling undervalued and stressed, it is very likely that differences of the nature that I have presented here will be further emphasised. The next chapter focuses on some of these conditions under which staff and pupils at Met were working and examines how they feel changes could be implemented to ultimately improve academic achievement.

Chapter 8 Structural barriers to increased academic success

I have, so far, shown how staff definitions of academic success and failure are rooted in a discourse saturated with references to ethnicised and classed stereotypes about pupils and their families in a way that contrasts with pupils' who predominantly regard doing well at school as related to being focused and working hard. Specific forms of dress and cultural interests, perceived by some members of staff, as related to a Black street culture were ostensibly associated with Black pupils', notably Black boys', perceived disinterest in school (Chapter 3). Also evident in these largely female staff reports were sexualised overtones of fear of the Black male student. In Chapter 4, I examined the nature of the interaction between staff and academically successful students, drawing particularly on how this was played out in the everyday teaching and learning context of the school. I am going to elucidate the concept of academic success even further in this chapter by focusing on the ways in which staff felt that they could be supported in their posts and ultimately increase academic success. The findings are reported in three sections: school level concerns, regarding the ways in which systems or structures within Metropolitan High itself or which are within the remit of the school, might be improved; governmental recommendations, which refers to perceived deficits or restrictions at the level of central government; and, finally, the wider education system which centres on observations of the British system in relation to those in overseas countries. The pupil section is less complex and far-reaching with recommendations for change located within the school, at teacher attitude and at methods of teaching.

Staff

School level concerns

Poor management was the most frequently cited concern at school level. The senior management team (SMT) at Metropolitan High school had, shortly before my involvement with the school, undergone some significant restructuring. At the time of then fieldwork the SMT consisted of the headteacher, the deputy head and four assistant headteachers¹. With this reorganisation in mind, the section entitled 'How well is the school managed and led?' in the most recent Ofsted inspection report, carried out just over a year before the current research², stated that:

"The headteacher and senior staff provide good role models for other staff. For example, they are a *conspicuous presence* around the school, and deal efficiently and

¹ Two of the four assistant headteachers were not involved in the research.

² The research took place between January 2002 and January 2003. The Ofsted inspection took place in the Autumn term of 2000/2001.

firmly with any problems they encounter. This has helped *improve the pupils' attitudes and behaviour*, particularly in lessons." Metropolitan High School Ofsted Inspection report (2000) [emphasis added]

While I am not in a position to judge Met. according to inspection criteria and nor is it the focus of this research to do so, it is notable that remarks from the interviewed staff (see below) do not correspond with those stated by Ofsted. In fact the contrast is striking³. Staff demonstrated dissatisfaction with both the SMT structure, their perceived lack of involvement in everyday activities and were generally critical of the way in which the senior management team operated. For example, some members of staff explicitly stated that school policies should outline ways in which pupil behaviour could be managed more effectively. Where such policies were evident, it was felt that they were implemented inconsistently across the school:

"[I would want to put] in strong structures for everyone to know, from the senior management team down, the teaching staff [so] they all know that if a child is misbehaving, if there is a problem in (...) [in the] classroom environment this is what they do. I think people all deal with it very differently. Teachers deal with it all very differently but this is what they do and this is where that child goes as opposed to saying, 'stand out of the door'. Now if you say 'stand outside the door' then you can say 'and in ten minutes time when you have calmed down you can come back in' or you say 'remove yourself from the classroom' and then they should go somewhere [like a] referral room which is constantly managed by a teacher. We want very positive direction from senior management and we don't seem to get that (...)" Staff X

Although Staff X critiques the current methods for handling unwanted pupil behaviour s/he clearly has some ideas about how to address the problem. However, that there remains an issue suggests that, either s/he has shared her ideas and they were not implemented or, that s/he felt unable to make her/his views known. Notable in her/his strategy is the involvement of all staff "from the senior management team down", demonstrating a commitment to full staff inclusion that s/he feels is currently missing; a matter reiterated by Staff W:

"(...) procedures seem to get to a certain point and then they are just swapped between the Head of Year and the Head of Department or Head of Curriculum as they call it. There doesn't seem to be a clear way of going up to the top, for being dealt with at the top. I think there needs to be harsher sanctions and whatever. I don't think you should be excluded sort of willy nilly but it needs to be very very clear 'if you do this, this will happen to you'. Currently you have got a situation where different kids are treated differently; different members of staff will do different things." Staff W

Staff W repeats a number of the points raised by her/his colleague above, emphasising the need for procedures to be managed openly and efficiently beyond the level of Head of Year and Head of Curriculum area. Both Staff X and Staff W also reveal an inconsistency in the ways that

³ Of course, many of the views that I report here may have been repressed for the Ofsted inspection in the collective interests of the school. As an independent researcher I do not hold the same power as Ofsted and am unlikely to be regarded as a comparable threat to the school's existence.

different members of staff discipline pupils, corroborating the observations of pupils in the previous chapter who reported that reprimands were distributed irregularly amongst them and their peers. Comments regarding the senior management team were not limited to their handling of disciplinary issues. The following was noted immediately after the interview with Staff Z, once I had switched off the tape recorder:

"[S/He stated] that SMT are rubbish; teachers spend about 30 hours per week teaching; middle management 20 hours; senior management spend 10 hours. S/He can't understand what they do with the rest of their time. S/He doesn't know because s/he doesn't see them; there is a distinct lack of communication between SMT and staff (...)"
Fieldnotes, Staff Z

Whether or not the proportion of time spent teaching by the various levels of staff, as stated by Staff Z, is accurate is not relevant here. What is significant is the perception that there is an uneven and unfair distribution of work. The comment clearly shows that there is (at best) a lack of transparency in the roles of the SMT which, when weighed against this particular staff member's own commitments as a teacher, leads to feelings of stress and of a lack of support. Such sentiments are magnified by the fact that even if members of the SMT are on the school premises they seem invisible thus increasing feelings of frustration and feelings of working in isolation. When the SMT did choose to open lines of communication they were limited to particular contexts:

"([If they] want something done, you don't see them they write a memo, [they] delegate the work to someone else. You only see SMT and senior [staff] if something goes wrong (...)"
Fieldnotes, Staff Z

Here, Staff Z conveys the senior team as impersonal and uncaring, through the impersonal detachment of the writing of the memo only to surface should problems arise. If, as Staff Z's account is accurate, that there is no clarity in the role and responsibilities of SMT, that they only teach for approximately 10 hours per week and simply delegate work they want completed, Staff Z's feelings of bewilderment about how they spend the remaining time, during which he is busy teaching or attending to pupils' needs, can be understood. Staff Z's views are elaborated by Staff Y who explains here one of the changes s/he would make within the school, if she were in the position to do so:

- | | |
|---------|--|
| Staff Y | I would change the [pause] structure of management to make it more effective." |
| NR | "In what way?" |
| Staff Y | [smiling] "No comment." |
| NR | [I reassure Staff Y of confidentiality] |

- Staff Y "I know but it could be in a way that is more effective...more inclusive. I feel that the management doesn't take enough responsibility or interest in monitoring students or you know supporting staff where and as they need. It seems to end at a certain kind of middle management level."
- NR "(...) And how could they better monitor students?"
- Staff Y "By reports, through getting involved more in rewarding or maybe er, you know, going into classes to see actually you know how students work, how they respond rather than just you know to check whether teachers teach and how they teach."

The hesitancy indicated through the pauses, the initial unwillingness to comment and the fact that it was only a further reminder of confidentiality⁴ that encouraged Staff Y to proceed reveals an underlying apprehension about possible undesired repercussions should the content of the interview be publicised. It also evidences an environment where communication is indeed limited, as both Staff Z and Staff Y remark, and where certain staff appear to have little opportunity to freely express their opinions about their workplace and conditions. The senior management team are conveyed as distant from the daily realities of schooling and rather than the invisibility that cloaked them in Staff Z's complaint, here the SMT's power and authority is conveyed in their surveillance of teachers while they teach, rendering them unhelpful and distant and leaving the surveyed staff feeling disenchanted with their profession. Staff Z again:

- Staff Z "It is very much the type of job [in which] you can do twenty five fantastic things in any given day, you do just one thing wrong, its like 'excuse me but why did you do this?' And that's *always* where the focus is, always on the negative things not on the wonderful bit of work you did with that child, not the child that you helped out over there, not the child you helped that was being bullied or so on and so forth. It's always that one thing that you didn't do that you get pulled up on."
- NR "By?"
- Staff Z "By everyone. By the management, sometimes by the pupils, by parents."

The negative emotional weight to Staff Z's statement is difficult to miss. The theme of feeling unsupported continues here only to be accentuated by a lack of appreciation for much of the good work s/he does and for being "pulled up" on the random that might not have been completed satisfactorily. Disenchantment of this kind had serious repercussions on other areas of school life:

- Staff X "There is becoming more and more a better ethos in this school...better feeling in the school. I think it is clouded by a SMT lack of

⁴ All interviews began with assurances of confidentiality and that anonymity would be guaranteed.

communication within staff. SMT don't go about communicating properly with their staff therefore staff are disillusioned *which is then obviously gonna have an effect on kids.*"

NR "Is there any awareness that people feel like that?"

Staff X "Yeah but it seems to be disregarded." [emphasis added]

Leaving this despondency unaddressed is likely to cause it to intensify, affect overall morale and ultimately impact on relations with pupils. An environment where staff feel unable to voice their concerns and views implies that key decision-making processes are the responsibility of a few higher up in the staff hierarchy. This may have also contributed to the sense of powerlessness and dejection as evident in staff accounts presented here. Morale seemed so low that even when an arena for discussion and feedback was offered, it was viewed with suspicion:

"I just think things need to be clearer and stop being changed all the time. It also needs to be done in consultation with the staff whereas if a consultation document, or something like that has been put out which will basically tell you it's set in stone which makes people very very angry and again understandably people don't want to do something that they don't believe, that they think is not gonna work. They will just do it their own way; there will be lots of different things going on." Staff W

While it might be expected that there will be some resistance to change, to new or significantly revised organisational structures in any work context, the recurring theme throughout the evidence I have presented here is that there was a significant lack of communication throughout the various levels of the team. Staff lower in the hierarchy do not feel they have the power to express their views at any stage of the decision making processes and are of the opinion that their subsequent frustration, while noted, is ignored. However, one member of the senior management team did appear cognisant of her colleagues' sentiments:

"We have had a restructuring recently of the senior management team. I can understand why it's been done. In the long run it will probably make things better (...) but there are still fires to be put out (...) there are still things happening that have to be dealt with and I think *some of those are not fully being picked up* and that is causing staff a lot of stress and if the staff are stressed, and they are at the moment, then the whole temperature rises and you can see it. *You can see it in corridors, you can see it in classrooms, their voices go up. They get a lot more confrontational.*" Staff V [emphasis added]

Staff V's sensitive observation that there are "still things happening" some of which "are not fully being picked up" is noteworthy not simply because s/he is a member of a senior management team, which thus far has been conveyed as inactive and characterless, but because it is fair to expect that as a part of the team, s/he is in one of the best positions to affect change. That this does not appear to be the case suggests that the issue of poor communication is embedded amongst the SMT as well. Limitations of time and space prevent me from unpicking the specific

causes for this poor communication but the consequences it might pose for pupils as they attempt to achieve academically is especially important in the context of this research.

The data suggests two prominent ways in which lack of communication can impact on other areas of school life. The first considers the issue of low staff morale and how it affects interaction with pupils. Both Staff X ("staff are disillusioned which is then obviously gonna have an effect on kids") and Staff V ("if the staff are stressed, and they are at the moment, then the whole temperature rises and you can see it. You can see it in corridors, you can see it in classrooms, their voices go up. They get a lot more confrontational.") relate low staff morale and stress to poor staff-pupil interaction and, in the case of Staff V, increased conflict with pupils. For Staff W, the problem was so endemic that s/he felt the only solution was for particular members of staff to leave the school:

"I would get rid of some of the teachers very very fast. I would rather not go into it (...) but *some of them are very very angry with the children all the time, shouting, insulting them* and it results in a lack of respect for those members of staff and also they have no authority. *It makes the kids very angry* understandably and it (...) has a really detrimental effect across the board and it means that the kids take a lot longer to trust you (...)" Staff W [emphasis added]

The teachers in Staff W's example may or may not be angry as a result of the problems with management and associated issue of lack of communication. Irrespective of the source of their frustration, it is apparent, from Staff W's statement, that the impact on the pupils is problematic. Based on this and the evidence presented in the chapter on Dress and Demeanour, I propose that when stressed staff may be likely to be more confrontational *specifically* with those pupils who do not present and act as ideal, who do not conform to the alleged prerequisites of the successful student and, who are not situated as receptive learners. I contend that Black students, and in particular, Black male students may be *more likely* to be adversely affected in these situations. It would seem that the data supports this. Returning to the data in the Ofsted report the percentage of pupils at Met. receiving fixed term exclusions by ethnicity reveals that of pupils classified as Black Caribbean 18% (17% for total Black⁵ students) received a fixed period exclusion in the academic year prior to the Ofsted compared with 8% white pupils^{6 7}. The particular reasons for these exclusions were not the subject of this research but earlier reports by Staff X and Staff W suggest that the disproportionate numbers of Black students receiving exclusions may be exacerbated by the inconsistent implementation of reprimands by different members of staff.

⁵ This includes Black Caribbean, Black African and Black other pupils.

⁶ The data was not available by gender.

⁷ There were just over 2 times as many white pupils in the school compared with Black Caribbean heritage pupils.

Ineffective means of communication also appeared to affect pupil achievement. Continuing the plea for consistency and continuity in the way that strategies were enforced, Staff U recalled:

“...there doesn't seem to be consistency in how we follow things up and the way certain incidents are dealt with in the school (...). We used to have this thing where at the start of the year we could actually get together and start talking about tutor groups or certain pupils have meetings with ... talk to certain people and say this student is particularly difficult. What are the structures for dealing with them as a team? We don't have any time for doing that sort of thing now. So you might have a student who maybe is a C/D borderline in Year 11 but should be getting a C and if every one was dealing with him that suited him best then maybe he could get those five A to Cs but because no one is talking about how we actually get the student to achieve maybe he'll slip through the net and won't make those grades.” Staff U

The lack of consistency in handling incidents and the poor communication had, for Staff U, a direct impact on the ability to support students in the “D-to-C conversion” (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000), important for raising the school's achievement of “those five A to Cs” in performance tables (see Chapter 4 – Academic Success). Again, it is not possible to explicitly determine whether the cancellation of the types of meetings that Staff U describes have had a direct result on achievement but it is notable that the feeling was that there were pupils likely to “slip through the net” and not “make the grades” as a result.

The following episode, while continuing to reflect staff reticence at expressing their views openly, also provides a good example of Gillborn & Youdell's (2000:133) ‘educational triage’, where scarce resources are channelled towards those students expected to achieve the all-important A to C grades. It is based on a conversation overheard between two members of staff:

“[The conversation is] about a message that [one] staff member [A] brought from Mrs Edwards to another teacher [B] who [was] running part of Gifted and Talented strand. The latter teacher [is] saying that [s/he] doesn't want [pupils to start] from Year 9, wants [them] from Year 7. Other staff member [A] says ‘Don't shoot the messenger’, and suggested if [B] didn't like [the] message [then s/he] should take it up with Mrs Edwards ‘but you don't have that type of conversation with Mrs Edwards’. Then [the messenger, A] recommended ‘quite strongly’ that any course of action to query the message should in fact go via [deputy head] to let him negotiate on teacher's [B's] behalf. ‘Don't go to Mrs Edwards yourself!’ “ Fieldnotes

There are a number of interpretations of this account. One which can be clearly identified as a fear of speaking directly to Mrs Edwards, to such an extent that the teacher B is warned against doing so and advised, instead, to channel any potential complaint through the deputy headteacher. However, it is also notable that while this teacher feels that the Gifted and Talented strand should start at pupils' point of entry to the school, Mrs Edwards is thought to be more concerned with focusing or limiting the resources to Year 9 pupils, a key point to impact on

pupil achievement as they start to work towards their preparations for Key Stage 4⁸. It seems that the reason for this restriction has not been made clear to this teacher and this may have increased his/her frustration in an environment where lines of communication and possibility of impacting outcome appear already limited.

Most of the problems identified at school level concern a need for open and coherent lines of communication amongst all levels of staff, with the opportunity to be able to share ideas for policy development. While I have not sought to unpick the specific reasons for this problem, I have shown some of the ways in which the resulting staff stress can, perhaps unwittingly, impact on achievement and the distribution of discipline, the latter particularly affecting Black students.

Government

Included under this heading are a number of concerns which were felt to restrict the capacity to be an effective teacher. Some are matters that could have been addressed under the 'School level changes' section except they sit more easily within a framework of change over which the government has ultimate control. Under this section I include remarks made about the way in which academic success was defined and the pressures that this put on Metropolitan High School.

Wrong definition of academic success

The general consensus amongst most of the interviewed staff at Met. was that the government's definition of academic success, as percentage of pupils achieving five or more A star to C grades, was restrictive. As I described in some detail in Chapter 4, one of the key factors that informed this judgement was the nature of the pupil intake:

"Anyone who looks at the school and says it's not doing well - it *is* doing well and even the figures show...and this is the good thing when you *are* doing well, all the parameters that you measure for success are being achieved and that's good. It's not always the case. Sometimes you can do well but the criteria that measure that may be wrong or not right. Like you look at A to C passes or whatever. In a certain school, A to C passes doesn't ...'cos of the area, different attitudes to work, different ways of viewing education may cause A to Cs not to be a good criteria for measuring success." Mr Bailey (teacher)

The government's definition of success is not regarded as apt for all types of pupil and by implication all types of family. Here Mr Bailey refers to the local area which can be read as code for particular types of families. The acquisition of five or more A star to C grades may be too ambitious or inaccurate a measurement for some pupils who have "different attitudes to work"

⁸ See Literature Review and Chapter 7 for description of Key Stage 4 assessment.

and of "viewing education". It was felt that Metropolitan worked hard with the intake that it had and gained a form of success (see Chapter 4) with some pupils that was not formally recognised:

"Even getting children to read is a big deal in schools such as this, it doesn't necessarily affect your A to C grades but you have made progress." Mr Bailey (teacher)

Although helping pupils to read is a significant achievement, arguably unless the school meets a series of specific targets, which include the acquisition and yearly increase of GCSE A* to C grades, it may be judged as having "serious weaknesses" in its Ofsted inspection. Metropolitan High School had received this classification in the Ofsted inspection that took place just over a year before this present research. Under such conditions, a school has two years to implement recommendations from its Ofsted report, before it is inspected again⁹. This was a period of considerable pressure for staff contradictorily compounded, it can be argued, by their way of defining and assessing academic success:

"I am sorry but the fact that we manage to keep some of those kids *in* school is a bloody credit in itself. So what if they don't get As and Cs! The fact [is] that they have actually got through and they have got half a chance of college (...)" Mr Brown (teacher)

Mr Brown's frustration with the workings of the system is evident in the emotional content of his statement. There are pupils who are seen as never likely to achieve in governmental terms but who might achieve in ways in which they may not have originally aspired. A pupil in such a position was considered successful in the inclusive definition of success extolled by Metropolitan High school.

"It comes back around to how we think of new universities? Do we think it is successful to go to a new university? If people were honest, they would say 'hmmhmm they went to...' you hear this all the time...'they went to a polytechnic? Well my 2.1. is better than their 2.1.' You are never gonna change all those things. On the other hand I think it better if someone manages to go to a new university if their journey has taken them to never thinking about anything to that. That's a big journey. It doesn't have to be to a well-known university (...) so measuring their success, they would have achieved success." Ms Steiner (support staff)

Ms Steiner's interrogation of new versus old universities reinforces the above points made by Mr Bailey and Mr Brown where they maintain that different levels of achievement though not necessarily formally recognised nor highly valued in societal terms are nonetheless significant.

⁹ If the school has not made satisfactory progress at the end of this period and if the problems are found to be "of such severe nature" it can, following this second inspection be put into "special measures" and ultimately be closed. The labels of "serious weaknesses" and "special measures" are therefore seen to be reflective of a failing school. Some have contended that this type of treatment pathologises schools rather than offering the kind of support that they really need (Dunford in Woodward, 2001).

Met. clearly faces a tension between this internally constructed multi-layered notion of success and the strict singular definition imposed by government:

"The school gets judged on its five A to Cs and its A to Gs (...) I think we are being *moulded* in a way that *that's what we end up talking about all the time* because it's a government thing that *that's what schools are judged on, that's what Ofsted will judge us on* (...) we are waiting Ofsted inspection [and] your focus becomes on those things whether you want it to be whether you think that is the real issue or not *that begins to be what you focus on.*" Ms Buckley (Head of subject area) [emphasis added]

To subscribe to a governmental definition of success is, reportedly, to lose any sense of individuality. The government is able to exercise a high level of surveillance through its inspection body, Ofsted, to ensure that all schools (irrespective of intake) conform to success by *its* terms. The language used by Ms Buckley speaks of power and control; Met is "moulded" and "judged" and is not able to determine its own development or direction "your focus becomes on those things whether you want it to be (...) or not", revealing some of the tension as Met. struggles to maintain currency so crucial to the functioning of the "A to C economy" (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000). Staff viewed this as an inaccurate way of viewing success which, by implication situated the government as wrong in its assessment and measurement:

"(...) to some extent she [the headteacher] scorns things like Ofsted... doesn't scorn them, but doesn't think that is the reason for existence. The reason for existence, the reason for my existence is to educate children." Mr Bailey (teacher)

Mr Bailey's comment reveals a perceived mismatch between the objectives of Ofsted (the government) and those of the school. The government is not perceived as interested in educating children but is portrayed as naïve, as having no idea of how to really measure success and as controlling, through its enforcement of inspections and reprimands rather than support. A better construction of success would see it as acknowledging and addressing the success in the terms that Met. espouses (see also Chapter 4):

Ms Buckley	(Head of subject area) "Really to me it shouldn't be on how many A to Cs we get, it should be how many students we get achieving to their potential."
NR	"How would you describe potential?"
Ms Buckley	"It's what they possibly could get if they worked to the best of their ability."

It might, therefore, in Ms Buckley's opinion, be possible to devise an interpretation of success that was based on reaching one's potential, on the fact that a pupil had "worked to the best of their ability". This lowers the expectation for high level, A to C success and would allow Met., and others like it, to portray itself as achieving in the ever-watchful gaze of the world beyond the

school gates. Such a definition, however, is also problematic because as I have shown it would explicitly condone the staff views that I have already described where ability was regarded by some as fixed and predictable and success as more likely amongst some social and ethnic groups. Such a definition would make acceptable the lower rates of achievement for those groups of pupils who are already failing within the education system and reinforce the kind of dichotomy in ideal student profile that I outlined in the table in Chapter 7. As an example, I turn again to Mr Foster's remarks which were discussed in the previous chapter:

- Mr Foster (SMT, Gifted & Talented co-ordinator) *"So it's not just 'oh you're good at Maths, you're good at English' I think you celebrate the whole lot. I don't think you can in any school unless it is a selective school talk really talk only about academic achievement because there are so many other achievements that happen and I wouldn't want to pull out the academic things from everything else that the school does."*
- NR "For example?"
- Mr Foster *"Like I say, the talented things; the extracurricular things. We've got amazingly talented athletes at this school. We have very talented rappers. We have lots of things that the pupils do, which if you don't dig deep enough you don't actually see (...) there are a whole lot of other things we do which are not measured but the government are not interested in measuring those things."* [emphasis added]

While existing governmental measures of academic success are problematic, it is clear that those offered by some of the teachers at Met., while attempting to address concerns about a low status student intake, would do little to address and minimise existing inequalities of attainment.

Performance tables

As might be expected, in view of staff criticisms about the way in which the government defined success, some staff also disapproved of the way in which A to C achievements were recorded and publicised in yearly performance tables.

"I think things like league tables are so damaging (...) 'cos people will look at [name of different school] in the league table and think 'I won't send my child there' whereas they achieved an awful lot for kids who came with very little to start with (...) they don't show a true picture of what a school does and how much a child might achieve (...)" Ms Bellingham (Support staff)

Clearly, one of the problems with the performance tables is that they do not allow recognition of Met.'s form of success; the achievements it may have made with helping children to read, for

example. Since this kind of success is currently unrecorded¹⁰ and it is A to Cs which are the recognised societal markers of success, it is likely that middle class parents who have access to or who are able to access information about the performance, pupil population, and status of different schools will bypass Met (see for example Ball, 2003¹¹). This and the fact that Met does not select may further contribute to its skewed intake (see Chapter 7). The governmental focus on A to Cs tended to compel schools to think in the same way:

"Well I think there's an awful lot of pressure on schools because of leagues tables really and the pressure is on for them to see it more and more in the narrowest of terms you know how many children got a certificate and how many got the magic A to Cs (...) It does put more and more pressure on working with the children who are going to be the ones who get you in the league tables. I'm not saying this school...the pressure is there for all schools but I think actually this school will always have a lot of time for maybe the less able children and bringing them along and I think we do try to do that as much as we can." Mrs Simmons (Support staff)

That schools feel pressured as a result of the publication of these tables has been well documented (Gillborn, 1997; Davies, 2000; Manning, 2006) with their controversial and public condemnation by some teaching unions leading to calls, in some cases, for them to be completely abolished (Curtis, 2004; see also Kelly, 2004 and Woodward, 2001). Since the school results are often reported in the press in hierarchical order, with the best performing schools at the top of the list, the league tables (as they are called in this context) represent an additional element of pressure for schools:

"The government (...) have been putting pressure on schools to compete with each other, to prove, you know, that one school is better than another. They've got absolutely no idea [*shakes his head, chuckles and sighs exasperatedly*] about how to measure improvement, you know the idea of value added¹²." Mr Foster (SMT, Gifted & Talented Co-ordinator)

This reinforces previous evidence from several Met. staff that the government's understanding of schools and their analysis of academic achievement is simplistic and unrealistic.

¹⁰ Since the fieldwork for this research was carried out the government, in response to the widespread criticisms of performance tables, introduced in 2002 the notion of "value-added scores" to show how schools have helped pupils progress since taking their Key Stage 2 tests and since taking their Key Stage 3 tests. The aim is to capture improvement that might not be reflected in the school's percentage of pupils achieving five or more A* to C grades at GCSE and equivalent (see www.dfes.gov.uk/performance/tables/schools_04/sec3b.shtml accessed 09/05/06) although this new system has also been subject to criticism (Daily Mail, 2003)

¹¹ Ball (2003:104) reports that where such parents choose schools within the state-sector, certain schools such as those *seen to* attract a high proportion of pupils from minority ethnic pupils like Met., are not even highlighted as a consideration.

¹² See Footnote 10.

Class size

An additional difficulty associated with impinging on the effectiveness of teaching was the number of pupils both in Met as a whole and, as a result within individual classes. Although government recommendations state classes can comprise of up to thirty pupils (School Standards and Frameworks Act 1998) the number of students at Met was felt, by some staff to increase the burden of their workload:

"I mean every child has a right to education and every parent feels that their child should get all this attention etcetera but what they've got (...) [but] the sheer weight of [pupil] numbers means I can't do everything but you are expected to do everything and sometimes that can be hard." Mr Brown (teacher)

Mr Brown's acknowledges that "every child has a right to education" but the comment which follows strongly indicates that he feels that the number of pupils directly affects his ability to provide every child with the best form of education. "I can't do everything" could have various interpretations but in this context, and in light of his previous comments about teaching, I understand it to refer to the extent of pressure he feels under and a sense of his being overwhelmed by a seemingly never-ending workload. This heightened stress is likely to have repercussions for staff-pupil relations (see School Level Concerns, above) and emphasize staff receptivity to pupils seen to display and perform a legitimate academically successful profile. In relation to this very point, I already revealed earlier reports from the academically successful pupils in this study that some teachers distributed their time and attention unevenly amongst them and their classmates (Chapter 7, Pupil Section). This notion of the apparent burden of class size also was felt to be a contentious matter for one of Mr Brown's colleagues:

"Look at private schools to know what I am talking about: they are equipped, they are resourced and their ratio between student and teacher (...) is one to eight or one to twelve." Mrs Fitzpatrick (teacher)

While it was not clear where Mrs Fitzpatrick obtained her statistics, it is clear that private schools are seen to represent some kind of teacher utopia enabling them to carry out their job effectively with full resources and reasonably small class sizes so much so, that the accumulative pressures of Met. appear to have allowed her to disregard the fact that her own school's student to teacher ratio is 1 to 14¹³, just two pupils more than she states as the private school ideal.

¹³ Although of course this may vary as pupils sit their options and, possibly, with the reduced teaching timetable of senior management.

Paperwork

By far one of the most common complaints, voiced by just over a third of the interviewed teachers, was the amount of paperwork that existed. Paperwork included work aimed at supporting the improved management of the school, such as the writing of policies and, also the preparation of work for lessons, for example lesson plans and worksheets. Two members of staff made explicit complaints at the sheer impracticability of writing plans for every lesson:

"I will not pretend that I prepare every single lesson or that it is physically possible to prepare every single lesson (...)" Mrs Fitzpatrick (teacher)

This sentiment was magnified during inspections when teachers were required to prepare thoroughly for each separate lesson:

"You know we have Ofsted coming up? Well for the Ofsted we've got to produce lesson plans. You are meant to produce these lesson plans for *every* single lesson, for *every* single day. (...) Now in order for me to do a lesson plan that will satisfy Ofsted will take me forty five minutes to an hour. I can't do that every day! I teach four, five periods every day! I can't do that day in, day out. It's just physically impossible as well as mark all the books, as well as deal with all the problems that arise, as well as deal with detentions!" Mr Brown (teacher)

This comment provides further evidence of staff dissatisfaction but also reveals the performative adaptations seen as necessary to successfully negotiate the Ofsted inspection. As I demonstrated earlier (see *Wrong definition of Academic Success* above) Ofsted, as a government institution, are conveyed as out of touch with the realities of schooling and appear to only add to the existing pressures that staff have to endure. Both Mr Brown and Mrs Fitzpatrick make reference to the preparation of plans for each lesson as being beyond physical possibility, powerfully evoking an image of the exertion and fatigue that such a work requires. Other comments about paperwork tended to be more general, reflecting a sentiment of despondency in the meaninglessness attached to its completion:

"I suppose what comes into that is a reduction in paperwork you know a lot of the things that I've been spending my time on...you know I write policies that no-one will ever follow or read that are stuck in a folder somewhere. [We] *duplicate data over and over again* in different formats, stuff like that, you know. Half of what I do is not related to teaching at all: contacting people; setting things up. That's not what I want to do. I wanna be getting people to learn things." Mr Sanderson (teacher) [emphasis added]

"I think another thing is the amount of paperwork and bureaucracy. And this is what staff always say that their teaching and preparation, being with... time with the student is more important. If you spent time with a student who was suspended, quality time, more often than not it makes the whole difference. *We are too busy filling in, folding sheets of paper.*" Mrs Hempscott (SMT) [emphasis added]

"The amount of paperwork; the circulation of paperwork; *the overindulgence on the writing of policy for every single thing you do*; following up issues by *putting it down in triplicate* to make sure it's circulated. All these things take away from teaching. It adds an unnecessary strain (...)." Mrs Davidson (teacher) [emphasis added]

The use of language by all three teachers is very emotive. The need to write "policies that no-one will ever follow up or read" conveys a sense of dismalness in the knowledge that his already limited time¹⁴ is further wasted in this way. It is also not helped by the fact that the policies Mr Sanderson has taken time to produce are not viewed as important enough to remain publicly accessible but are simply "stuck in a folder somewhere" and, it would appear, forgotten about. The interminability and mundaneness attached to simply completing this paperwork is vividly reflected in Sanderson's juxtaposition of "duplicate" and "over and over"; Mrs Hempscott's "filling in, folding sheets of paper" and the decadent wastefulness Mrs Davidson attributes to "the overindulgence of writing policy" in "triplicate". For all of these teachers, the paperwork distracts from the real reason they are in school which is to directly work with and teach young people.

Staff shortage

Earlier I showed how various tensions around lack of communication increased staff frustration and affected the way that they interacted with students. Some teachers suggested that this accounted for poor relationships with students which I argued might be reflected in the disproportionate exclusion of many Black students who do not readily fit the academically successful profile. There was also the added bureaucracy of paperwork, (perceived) large class sizes and the need to subscribe to a government definition of success that served to undermine Met's achievements. These various pressures may have culminated in the lack of job satisfaction described by the following member of staff:

"A few people do look like they are just earning for a wage and they see half past three come and you see them quickly run out there [and] these people are struggling in in the morning a lot of them. As soon as half three comes - I've never seen people run like Linford Christie in my life (...) I don't think that they feel it." Staff J

For another member of staff these accumulative difficulties increased the likelihood of resigning, somewhat bitterly encompassed by the following observation by a colleague: "if you are here for a good time you are in the wrong job". Indeed school records indicated that twenty nine

¹⁴ The fieldwork for this research was conducted between January 2002 and January 2003. On 15 January 2003, the government along with national education agencies and teaching unions (aside from the NUT who refused to sign) signed a National Workload Agreement designed to better focus teacher time on teaching and reduce workload induced stress. Initiatives, introduced over a time line from September 2003 included a reduction in teacher time spent carrying out administrative tasks (such as those being described here by Met staff), time allowed for preparing, planning and assessment and the overall support for a better work-life balance (see www.tda.gov.uk/Home/remodelling/nationalagreement/introduction.aspx for further details. Accessed 10/05/06)

members of staff left Met. in the two year period between Autumn 2000 and Autumn 2002. This high turnover had various negative repercussions for the remaining staff and pupils:

"As soon as you get high turnover of staff then you get lots of supply teachers and lots of short term contract teachers. It disturbs the whole ethos of the school and makes the behaviour of the kids much worse. If they see a new face every day or every time there is no consistency and when there is no consistency things don't get followed through and done. So I think what needs to be looked at is the whole rules of engagement of the nature of the job." Mr Sanderson (teacher)

The position faced by Met (and similar schools) is a challenging one. Concerns around lack of communication, class size and paperwork clearly impose a great deal of stress on the teachers in this research which is likely to encourage them to leave their posts. The challenge is to recruit and retain teachers who are committed and also stay long enough so that new policies to stimulate positive change can take effect. According to one teacher, the national shortage of teachers at the time¹⁵ meant that Met. did not always recruit the most qualified or experienced teachers to fill its vacancies:

"I think what you get as well [due to staff shortage] is you get people appointed to jobs that they otherwise wouldn't be appointed to if there were, you know, if they had three or four candidates to choose from. So you're getting people into jobs that they shouldn't be doing. Teachers appointed who - don't tell anyone [*gives a quick nervous laugh*] - who probably aren't good enough." Staff B

Met is in a difficult position. Irrespective of the work it does within the school, its external image and the shortage of teachers nationally in particular subject areas may well determine which candidates are likely to approach it. Staff B's remark also alludes to the view that the overall quality of teachers is not consistently of the same high standard, revealing an underlying concern about the extent of their training and experience. Such teachers, who "aren't good enough" will clearly affect the educational performance of pupils at Met. and reduce the probability of those achieving academic success as defined by the acquisition of A to C grades.

Education systems

A far less prevalent¹⁶ but nonetheless notable set of comments were directed at comparisons between the British education system and those of other countries. While the specific nature of the criticism directed towards the British system varied, the other countries (or continents) were usually held in high esteem. For example, pupils newly arriving from countries in Africa (usually

¹⁵ The then Teacher Training Agency (it was renamed in September 2005 to Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA)) was in the midst of a widespread campaign to encourage more recruits into teacher training (see for example TTA (2003a).

¹⁶ Mentioned by just 4 of the 21 interviewed members of staff.

Western African) and Jamaica were considered to value education highly in a way that was evident in their schooling achievements:

"(...) if you teach a class yeah and you get a kid arrives from Ghana...well kid arrives from Ghana, you think 'this kid's gonna know how to do some Maths' and sure enough... kids from Africa, who've been to school, they're likeand from Jamaica, they're like so much above our kids. I've got friends who've erm actually er, you know, Black teachers who've said 'Send my kid back to Jamaica, just for a year just to get some *learning*' [*this word said in assumed 'Caribbean' accent*], yeah, cos they don't get any teaching over here, in many ways like in primary school." Mr Condon (teacher)

Mr Condon's is an interesting perspective for a number of reasons. While pupils in Britain are subject to range of analyses and criticism in relation to class, ethnicity and gender, the pupils from Ghana, Africa more widely and Jamaica are portrayed as a homogenous group automatically imbued with an aptitude that seems to be lacking in their (Black) British counterparts. Mr Condon remains simultaneously critical of the British education system "'cos they don't get any teaching over here" which may be levelled at the alleged incompetence of teachers in the UK or, at the structures, rules and regulations within which teachers must work. While it remains unclear whether it is his friends, the "Black teachers" who have said this or it is his interpretation of their intent, such is the reported excellence of the Jamaican education system that simply sending your child there "just for a year" is sufficient to undo any wrongs induced in the British context. Such worth is attributed to children from these countries that traditional indices of determining success at point of intake and thought to adversely skew achievement at Met. are suddenly overlooked and these pupils are bathed in the type of high expectations that I have repeatedly shown to be scarce for those pupils not defined as achieving:

"Many of children from Africa stand out a mile for their valuing of education and for wanting to work really hard and some of our greatest success stories have been children who have come from the continent of Africa, *maybe even with not much English to begin with* but they have had that real desire; they have seen education as their passport to improving their circumstances and being a success in life and they are prepared to work really hard. And I think sometimes, in this country, you know, that seems to be lacking, you know, people tend to take it for granted..." Mrs Simmons (support staff) [emphasis added]

In Chapters 4 and 5, I showed how an intake which comprised of pupils with Special Educational Needs and English as an Additional Language (EAL) was thought to impede overall school achievement. Mrs Buckley (Head of Maths) spoke of EAL as "a barrier in itself.", yet for Mrs Simmons, the barrier can be overcome or arguably is seen to be minimised, if the child comes from Africa where again, as with Mr Condon, there seems to be an uncritical vision of a widespread valuing of education. By inference Black British pupils are conveyed as having little regard for education:

"But it seems to be... and I've read sort of articles and stuff where parents have sent their kids back to Nigeria and Jamaica and wherever because education is looked at very differently. So it isn't seen in sort of a negative way, it is seen in a positive way to achieve and somewhere down the line we are loosing that with the sort of boys to get the look, to have a sort of street cred about them and academic success doesn't necessarily fit into that, it isn't part of the scenario (...) I mean somewhere along the line we are loosing something within our education structure to get rid of that thing with boys that you know you are a swot, you're a nerd, a wimp because you're studying, because you achieve." Ms Bellingham (support staff)

For all these members of staff, the problem lies within the British context. Ms Bellingham feels that Black British boys (here 'race' is inferred by the references to particular countries and to street credibility that has been associated with Black boys) are more concerned with "street cred" where academic success plays an insignificant role and she appears to attribute this to something "we are loosing within our education structure", or not getting right, that results in Black boys acting in this way.

While emphasising the same need to value education, Mrs Edwards' focus was directed towards Black British parents and their parenting styles:

"And one of the things I have seen with the Black parents since I've been here (...) in some respects (...) I have less respect for parents than when I started teaching in '81 as an ordinary classroom teacher because the parents of the children I taught, a lot of them were a lot older. They were very respectful of your position as a teacher *because back home in the West Indies, teachers are respected, you know, very much respected, you know they are very respectful.* Now these, some of these parents want to come and tell me as a headteacher about 'your parts'¹⁷ or whatever and that to me you know...if your child knows that you view their teachers like that, what hope have you got of them respecting you? And I think that's where a lot of our problems start with Black children and education because whether you think the teacher is right or wrong, just the way you talk about the teacher and whatever (...) if you are going to go and tell the teacher this and whatever, the children don't have any respect and that's why I say *the value of the pros of education comes from because our parents always taught us we need the teachers more than they need us.* Teachers have got that education that is going to help us to better ourselves. That's not the profile, the status that teachers have now." Mrs Edwards (headteacher) [emphasis added]

There are a number of points being made here. There is an implicit rejection of the younger age profile of current Black parents who have school age children. The age is directly associated with a lack of respect and manners which were seen as evident amongst the older generation of parents who, Mrs Edwards assumes, share her knowledge (which may have been gained either first or second-hand) of how things were "back home in the West Indies". There is sense, drawing on a nostalgic ideal, that these older parents were cognisant of former traditions and passed this down to their children. Mrs Edwards is also unhappy with the current status of

¹⁷ That is relating to genitalia.

teachers which she attributes to poor parenting (and the lack of tradition) but can also be viewed as a problem amongst the profession more widely¹⁸. As the next section shows, however, the perception of teachers and their profession was also greatly affected by the way in which they acted towards pupils and the amount of interest they took in teaching and individual pupil achievement.

Pupils

“Teachers don’t really care, so long as the kids... so long as they get their grades, they [‘re] happy.” Samuel Owusu (Year 11)

This section is largely based on pupils’ responses to questions about their favourite or least favourite teacher(s). The purpose of the questions was to understand the nature of the relationships with which pupils were most easily or least likely to engage and which they felt would be conducive to their learning. I did not have the opportunity to formally interview most of the teachers they mentioned but talked to or observed many during the course of the school day, for example in the staff room or at meetings. I was also able on at least three occasions to identify a member of staff as a result of particular comments by a pupil about their behaviour or way in which they spoke to them.

Pupils’ responses are grouped in two sections: negative and positive experiences.

Negative experiences

Negative experiences related to the ways in which staff handled discipline, their teaching styles, and manners. I examine each of these in turn.

Ineffective handling of discipline

About a third of the pupils who mentioned teachers they did not like did so in reference to their inability to discipline or control the class effectively. For one pupil this centred on concern about an incident in which she was involved:

“She gets on my nerves. When I was in Year 7, yeah she used to pick on me, I don’t know why and when my mom came in for the report thing yeah, she told my mum that I talked a lot and was disruptive and stuff like that and I *never* talked *once* in her class. And I said to my mum, ‘you can go round and ask all the girls or boys or whatever in my

¹⁸ As reflected by the need for a widespread recruitment campaign by the TTA to which I referred earlier that was enhanced by offering teachers support in, for example, obtaining a mortgage and by financial incentives for those who committed to teach in shortage subject areas such as Mathematics.

class if I am disruptive in her lesson and they will tell you the same thing'. And so she went and asked the kids in my class now and they told my mom that I don't disrupt nothing. Ms [name of teacher], when we went back to talk to her she was gone! She used to get on my nerves but she has got better now though."

Michelle Gregory (Year 9, Black British)

The perceived injustice, coupled with the fact that the teacher had left when Michelle and her mother went to speak with her about the incident, have resonated deeply enough to remain vivid in Michelle's memory some 2 years after the event and even though, by her own admission, the teacher now treats her in a more fairly. In fact, these successful students seemed very astute about the way in which discipline was administered in the classroom (see also Chapter 7); whether it was meted out fairly to all pupils and, whether the misdemeanour actually warranted the particular form of discipline. The following account by Natalie Davidson is a very good example of this latter observation:

Natalie (Year 10, Black British) "She can't control the class. Maybe she can teach Year 7 or primary school but she doesn't know how to control a class with other children. (...) if someone is fighting she will send them out of the class but if someone is rude she will go and get a teacher to come for them. That doesn't make sense if you've got fighting in a class she'll send them out but if someone is rude she goes and gets a teacher or the headteacher to come and take them."

NR "Right. What should she do?"

Natalie "I don't know. Teachers go on training innit. They go on their INSET Days. They have training, they should know how to deal with it. *She should put things in perspective she should know like (...) someone fighting is worse than being rude 'cos someone is actually getting physically hurt so that should be more on top of the list than someone saying 'oh shut up'. 'I am going to get the deputy headteacher because you told that person to shut up' or 'I've been told to shut up [so] I am going to get the deputy head teacher' but pupils all flinging over tables and whatever and she's all trying to hold them back (...). She should have got someone that time.*"

Natalie does not query the need to enforce discipline within the classroom and nor does she excuse the behaviour of her peers. She remains critical of the way in which the severity of the punishment seems disproportionate to the behaviour. It is evident that this does not make sense to her and contributes to her perception of this teacher as ineffective, a judgement which is compounded by the fact that the training and professional development that staff received is also deemed ineffective in providing her with the skills for handling such situations. Both Natalie and Michelle's accounts suggest a need for clarity and consistency in handling behaviour supporting the similar calls strongly expressed by a number of Met. staff earlier in this chapter. It is possible that the effective implementation of such a policy would reduce the perception of injustice felt in

the way discipline is handled. Such was the alleged extent of this inequity, that one student was suggested that teachers actually obtained pleasure from reprimanding students:

"It just annoys me (...) To me they enjoy punishing students in school. If they had a cane in this country, they'd enjoy that a lot. But thankfully they don't!"

Samuel Owusu (Year 11, Black African)

This quote nicely emphasizes the randomness seen in the way that staff discipline pupils. It is clear that the actual act for which the pupil is being reprimanded has, for Samuel, become lost in the disproportionality of the punishment and the haphazard way in which discipline takes place. It is important to bear in mind the fact that these are the views of students who have been selected for the research because they have been defined by the school as academically successful and perhaps will demonstrate a limited perspective. I would expect the views and experiences of less successful students to be more pronounced since, as noted in the previous chapter they were more likely to be subject to distrust and frequent reprimands. However, the apparent injustice of these situations may have contributed to the strength of feeling and the way in which they were reported.

Two of the students were critical of the way in which teachers managed the class because their lack of control had direct consequences for the amount of time then spent on teaching:

"He can't get the pupils to like settle down and we don't get a lot of work done in that lesson." Justin Soloman (Year 10, Turkish Cypriot)

"He is always picking on the bad students...that he classes as bad. Every little thing that they do you have to come out of the classroom and he goes out to speak to them so it's wasting time." Nadine Taylor (Year 10, Black African Caribbean)

Nadine's comment is particularly interesting because she seems to query and problematise the teacher's judgement and classification of some students as bad and secondly, the fact that once labelled, these students are then reproached for "every little thing that they do" implying that they subjected to heightened and disproportionate surveillance on account of how they have been categorised.

Poor teaching styles

A disengaging style of teaching was also likely to increase the probability that a teacher would be consigned to the "least favourite" favourite category. Complaints on this subject were generally centred on Mathematics, for which there were a number of different teachers, and Science. Pupils tended to dislike these lessons because they involved little teacher preparation or involvement:

"(...) and *how* he teaches is quite boring and, like, you won't remember it because its not as inspiring as if you were teaching it and trying to make it exciting. He just tells you it and you have to do exercise books all the time. I think that's not a good way of teaching if you want people to remember what they're doing." Daniel Clark (Year 10, white)

A more stimulating teaching environment would achieve greater pupil interest and commitment to the lessons. That these academically successful students feel uninspired by the teaching methods strongly implies that the situation must be considerably worse for their less successful peers. These pupils do not want worksheets or exercise books where they must simply copy or complete tasks. They favour a degree of creativity in the lessons and the opportunity for interaction:

- | | |
|------------------|--|
| Michelle Gregory | (Year 9, Black British) "Well my old Maths teacher (...) and he just sets the work, just gives you the pages to do in the book and you just do it. He don't mark your books, he don't show that he ca...he's just <i>there</i> to do his job.(...) he's just like 'here's the book, do page duh duh duh duh duh' and you will just hand in your book at the end it." |
| NR | "And what do you think other people think about that?" |
| Michelle | "A lot of people don't like that (...) they basically don't take interest in the lesson any more because it is just something that they do...to copy the book. You don't learn from copying a book." |

The teacher's lack of engagement in both teaching and the pupils themselves is conveyed by Michelle's "he's just *there* to do his job" and the dullness expressed through "'here's the book, do page duh duh duh duh duh'". Her description of his manner of saying the page numbers conveys predictability and monotony that must make the classes difficult to endure. There is no sense of his commitment beyond the basics of getting through the National Curriculum. This apparent disenchantment affects the manner in which he teaches and, in turn, even this successful student's interest in the class. Here is Year 11 student, Michael McNamara expressing similar views about a different Maths teacher:

- | | |
|------------------|---|
| Michael McNamara | (Year 11, Black African Caribbean) "I don't like the way he teaches either." |
| NR | "And what is that like?" |
| Michael | "He will say 'right today we're doing...trigonometry.' He will explain what it is, give a couple of examples and then hand out the workbooks and we'll answer questions on it." |
| NR | "So which part of it is it you don't like?" |
| Michael | "The workbook - answering the questions. I find the workbook ...I suppose that's the only way." |

- NR "And what would you prefer?"
- Michael "I don't know. [pause] More [pause] just that he would teach us another way."

Like his peers discussed above, Michael dislikes workbooks as an engaging way of learning. He does not mention a dislike for the subject area in itself but aspires for a more stimulating form of teaching.

Bad manners

Sarcasm or rudeness or any form of bad manners was also heavily frowned upon by pupils and almost immediately justified dislike of a teacher. Two pupils gave specific examples of such behaviour:

"[*Deep sigh*] I think it would be the Maths teacher [who is my least favourite]. He patronises people. Just like the other day, we were doing work on exam papers. There was a table there: one girl was doing higher paper; one girl was doing foundation. They were talking and he goes "She's doing foundation and you are doing higher. There is no need to talk". But he just highlighted the point that she's doing foundation and she's doing higher and I think made that person feel less important."

Nicole Adams (Year 11, Black Other)

Citing the different levels at which these two pupils were working as a means of reprimanding them for their behaviour was deemed by Nicole as unnecessary since it only served to highlight a distinction between them that made the foundation pupil feel inferior. The teacher's comment indicates that these two pupils ought to have absolutely nothing in common on account of their different levels and therefore should have nothing to talk about. His attitude and Nicole's subsequent perception of the incident are very significant since not only do they echo earlier discussions about the inferred fixedness of pupil "ability" (Chapter 4: Academic Success) but it also reveals how pupils feel about their allocation to different teaching groups (setting or mixed) and, also the extent to which ideas about ability subsequently affect the way in which teachers treat pupils (see Chapter 7: Differential Treatment).

The next account is important because it demonstrates not just students' dislike for impoliteness but also how their behaviour and responsiveness to a teacher is shaped somewhat by whether they liked him or her:

"There did use to be one teacher that everyone thought was...and if...I mean we were lucky, we didn't have him teaching us a lesson every week but he used to sometimes take our Technology classes for cover lessons. *Nobody liked him so nobody got on with their work. Basically people didn't like him...because he was rude!* He used to be kinda polite and call everyone 'sir' and 'miss' but then there was a time in Technology and a

boy knocked on the door, came in and said that one of the teachers had hold him to ask *him* [referring to teacher] for a box of pencils and some paper and he said, 'No, I don't have any pencils but I am sure Oxfam sells them really cheap!' And was...I mean some teachers could do that and you could see that they were joking but you could see that when he said that he really meant that and he was meant to be rude. Then there was another time when someone asked for a pen, 'cos their pen [had] run out and he said, 'If your parents can't afford to send you to school with proper equipment then you shouldn't be coming here.' And so that really got people's backs up, so they were rude to him and then he was rude back and it just carried on.' Samantha Phillips (Year 10, white) [emphasis added]

Both incidents reported by Samantha resulted in pupils responding to the teacher's behaviour by being rude. That the rudeness escalates clearly is not conducive to a productive teaching and learning environment and may well result in increased teacher-pupil conflict and reprimands with the teacher probably being unaware of what stimulated the pupils' behaviour. The examples provided by these female students are particularly salient because they do not directly involve them, yet they express concern at the way in which the teacher has behaved or reacted to an incident. This seems to be a common theme in this section and was also evident in the above discussions on the ineffective handling of discipline. Students require teachers to be fair and consistent in their actions and to speak with them in a polite and reasonable manner. Specific examples of teachers and learning environments that pupils responded to positively are discussed in the next section.

Positive experiences

Pupils were very predisposed to teachers who seem to care about them as individuals. They seemed to recognise and appreciate any extra time or attention given to them as an investment in their personal ambitions and goals:

"Favourite teacher? [English teacher] She's the one teacher that she *really* wants to see *me* do well as a person. Its like she's the one teacher who would be kinda disappointed if I went the wrong way, if you understand what I mean but other teachers would just be like 'oh well, it's her life' but I think she would try to help me before its too late, before I go into the world and not do as good as I should do be doing."

Michelle Cobham (Year 10, Black African Caribbean) [emphasis in original]

Michelle's emphasis on "really" and "me" indicates that she feels this teacher's interest in her and her future is genuine in a way that she does not feel exists with other members of staff. That this kind of attitude is rare from members of staff is clearly conveyed by her reference to her being the "one teacher" who has her best interests at heart. This teacher clearly gives Michelle the impression that she is not just a pupil but is someone with character and individuality; she is "a person". Nathan Johnson expressed a similar sentiment about his favourite teacher who, in

her belief in him often gave up time to support him in sporting events both in and outside of school time:

- Nathan (Year 11, Black African Caribbean) "Miss [name of teacher], cos she's my PE teacher and she helps me a lot in my sports 'cos I run for, erm, two clubs and sometimes she comes and watches me and like, she comes to watch me play football and she...she gives me a lot of confidence, 'cos she says I can do well in the future. She helps me a lot. I like her.
- NR "So what does it mean that she comes to watch you? Is this in school time or outside of school time?"
- Nathan "School time and outside school time."
- NR "How does it make you feel?"
- Nathan "I'm happy to see her 'cos I wanna do well in front her. I don't know... it's something about that we bond...it's just nice."

The support offered by this teacher gives him a "lot of confidence" and increases his desire to do well in this subject area. Other pupils also mentioned how their favourite teachers tended to be those who helped them on a particular task or allowed them time to finish off a piece of work:

"[Technology teacher] 'cos she was the first teacher that I noticed wasn't just a teacher but someone...she is like a person. She cares about your grades and she offers help and when you stay behind she helps you and she will help you by doing it herself. Like, I was making a cushion and she done bits that I couldn't do and she finished it off for me as well. She done like so much of it; it's like half of its mine, half of its' hers."

Michael McNamara (Year 11, Black African Caribbean)

"Well, Mrs Fitzpatrick. If say I was giving up my work she would say you really like this subject you're good at it don't give up. [And textiles teacher] she does like lots of clubs and stuff. 'cos I didn't get my work finished (...) she like gave up her lunchtime to help me with it."

Maya Kelman (Year 11, Black African Caribbean)

Favoured teachers are those who seem to display a keen interest in helping pupils achieve often extending their support outside of assigned classroom time. Their aid does not go unnoticed by these students who value their acts and generosity as beyond that provided by most teachers and even, in Michael's view, assigns them a level of grounded humanness and warmth not usually related to staff.

Good rapport

Pupils tended to identify supportive teachers as those with whom they could easily get along and talk:

"I think it would probably be my ICT teacher (...) 'cos he is a really good teacher, he helps me with my work and that but also he's really laid back and *he speaks to you on the same level*. *He doesn't always act like a teacher* and talk down to you which is...I think that's what a lot of teachers do. Most of the teachers in this school don't do that but there are those few teachers that do, and front and most of the pupils don't like them and don't get on with them, so they don't do their stuff in their lessons."

Samantha Phillips (Year 10, white) [emphasis added]

Being spoken to "on the same level" is important to these pupils, but appears at odds with the hierarchy and power-embedded structure of the school (and the organisation of the wider education system). Samantha continues the earlier point expressed by Michael that good teachers are those who, somewhat contradictorily on first analysis perhaps, in fact do not behave or treat them in the way that conventional teachers would. Pupils are likely to respond positively to these unconventional teachers:

"[Technology teacher] He's just...*I don't think he's a real teacher*. I think he told us he fell into the job. He's a designer and he just came into teaching. He's not really a teacher, he's not the discipline type like 'do this, do that'. He talks to you like you're almost one of his friends. He doesn't cross the barrier between student and teacher but he is young like us. He's twenty eight, he told us that. He doesn't shout at us, even when we have done something wrong and we can talk to him like we are talking to our friends and I suppose a lot of the teachers would say that's not a good thing but I think that is a good thing especially for the children nowadays because they're not gonna respond to someone who keeps shouting and keeps shouting."

Natasha Wright (Year 11, Black African Caribbean) [emphasis added]

Natasha reads as significant and as apt the degree of rapport established with this member of staff, supported by the fact that he has told them his age. The fact that he was willing to share this type of personal information that is not frequently shared with pupils, further contributes to his positive status and to his being distanced from the image of the conventional teacher. That he does not shout at them is also indicative of his non-teacher like manner and of the fact that he seems to respect them as responsive individuals.

Fair treatment

As mentioned in the chapter on Differential Treatment, the interviewed pupils were sensitive to the ways in which teachers treated them and their less successful peers. Two students categorised teachers who were just in their treatment of them as amongst their favourites:

"[Religious Education teacher] He always makes sense and stuff and *he helps everybody equally and he is not afraid to tell people to shut up*."

Michelle Gregory (Year 9, Black British) [emphasis added]

"(...) obviously as the head of humanities she has to hear about different pupils and whatever but once she comes into your class its like *she forgets about that and she judges you for yourself*, if you understand what I mean? She's already had all the other

teachers say 'well this person is disruptive, this person is this, this person is that, this person is that' but because she brings you into the class and she judges you herself. She doesn't listen to what the other teachers might say."

Michelle Cobham (Year 10, Black African Caribbean) [emphasis added]

Being treated as an individual extends, for Michelle, to the way in which this teacher does not submit to the influential accounts of pupil behaviour provided by other teachers but appears to make her own judgements¹⁹. This readiness to wipe the slate clean and to not pre-judge pupils is similar to Ms Bellingham's report in the previous chapter of the teacher who successfully engaged with pupils, including those male pupils who were on the verge of exclusion from school. The characteristics that the students favour are not especially unusual or unique. They value being treated as individuals and want teachers who have faith that they can achieve well in the future. A common theme amongst many of the above quotations is that these teachers came across as real people:

"I like her because *she is not just a teacher* [emphasis added], she can also be like a friend. She is very friendly, she is very helpful. She is just very jokey. She acts like...a *person* instead of a teacher but she helps us a lot as well. She understands us." Nicole Adams (Year 11, Black Other)

For these successful students most teachers are not real people. The prevalent image of the average teacher is of someone dispassionate, who treats teaching as a job and nothing more. Such teachers are regarded as impersonal, distant and characterless. Those who are liked tend to behave opposite to most teachers. They are not rude, are clear and just when administering reprimands and teach in an interesting and creative way.

Discussion

Staff suggestions for improved work conditions were frequently aimed at the senior management team within Met itself, central government and the wider British education system. The perceived lack of communication within the school contributed to increased teacher stress which may, in turn, have resulted in more pupil reprimands and a high staff turnover.

The data presented in this chapter is of particular interest because it shows the way in which government policy and demands are received and interpreted at a local level, within a school. The chapter also reveals the strength of the hierarchy and power differential between central government and Met. as it imposes its own set of rules and regulations downwards to be enacted. It can be seen how staff at Met. attempt to give these demands validity in their own,

¹⁹ This is not an easy feat, for example, I described in Chapter 6 how I was influenced by teachers' accounts of Black male students and how I responded to this.

localised context and some of the tensions that result. Drawing in pupils' views and experiences to this discussion, uncovers a further space in this continuing hierarchy, in which they attempt to survive amidst the rules and regulations of a powerful body (Met. staff). At each level (pupils, staff) it can be seen that the group in question feels frustrated at the lack of sensitivity and awareness of the group which is seen to dominate it and as it attempts to give meaning to rules that do not always make sense.

A point of note relating to Met. staff is the way in which they easily spoke of the problems of teaching, improving achievement and the education system more broadly as being due to external factors, such as the inadequacies of government, families and the pupils themselves but never reflected on their own role and contribution to the problems. They continue to remain absent from their own debates; a point which is emphasised by the pupils' comments about teaching styles and staff attitude and behaviour which receive absolutely no mention in staff accounts.

While pupils acknowledge the need to work hard to achieve academically (see Chapter 4), they maintain that certain additional factors can facilitate their achievement. They value instances where teachers recognise them as individuals and support them in their work perhaps, for example, by giving up some of their spare time to help them finish an assignment. This contrasts with Ms Hill's apparent need (Chapter 6) to view pupils as a homogenous group with little individual identity in the assumption very lack of personalisation produced more receptive learners.

When I asked some of the interviewed staff what pupils needed to do to ensure popularity with them some immediately responded that they were not at Metropolitan High to be liked. While I was not suggesting that this was an overarching objective of their role, it is interesting how this personal attribute, the concept of liking and being liked was dismissed as irrelevant to school and their interactions with pupils really contrasting to pupil reports that this type of dynamic was important to them. Staff who were genuinely liked were often the exception to the overall teacher norm. Most teachers were perceived as caring little about their jobs or the pupils themselves:

"(...) it shouldn't be just a job where you get paid. It should be something that you enjoy 'cos if you are working with children, you've got to know children and how they are, you understand? It's like a lot of adults, they don't tend to know where children are coming from, they just assume you're a child, you don't know nothing...I think as adults you need come to realise that you need to know where your child is at (...) If a teacher shows that they care and they show that they wanna see you get somewhere, I think that will personally change a lot of pupils within the school they'll think that 'well there is somebody that does want to see me get far and hasn't labelled me as a bad child and...' d'you un'erstand?" Michelle Cobham (Year 10, Black African Caribbean)

Michelle's advice also reiterates the need for teachers to be sensitive to the individual needs and differences of pupils and not pre-judge them based on previous behaviour or staff hearsay. The contrast between her recommendations and the findings discussed in Chapters 6 and 7, where I showed how staff do make uncritical judgements about different sets of pupils according to stereotyped ethnic group and gender differences, is striking.

Chapter 9 Situating the research in context: using Bourdieu to examine how Black students become academically successful.

"One of [Bourdieu's] central concerns is the role of culture in the reproduction of social structures, or the way in which unequal power relations, unrecognised as such and thus accepted as legitimate, are embedded in the systems of classification used to describe and discuss every day life – as well as cultural practices – and in the ways of perceiving reality that are taken for granted by members of society." Johnson (1993:2)

Introduction

In exploring some of the school processes that enable Black students to become academically successful, I have sought to understand how staff and pupils at Metropolitan High school define academic success and whether certain pupils are seen to be more likely than others to succeed academically (Chapter 4: Academic Success). I have shown how teachers describe two forms of academic success that are hierarchically related and tend, variously, to include and exclude certain types of pupil according to factors relating to gender, family size and composition, perceptions about ability and ethnicised student subcultures (Chapter 7: Differential Treatment). These teacher discourses have been partially shaped by the rules, regulations and policies of central government about attainment and performance as Metropolitan seeks to compete within an education marketplace but have similarly been influenced by individual personal beliefs and views about the particular localised context of the school and its catchment area. I have argued that these definitions and the subsequent treatment of pupils according to a commitment to these definitions serve to exclude Black students and Black male students in particular from being perceived as capable of academic success. By contrast, pupils' descriptions of academic success appear, overwhelmingly, to be less influenced by either government or deterministic *a priori* notions of who is and who is not able to achieve success. For pupils, academic success is achievable by all who are suitably motivated, focused and prepared to work hard and further enhanced by committed teachers, who offer creative ways of learning and who are fair in their discipline.

In this chapter, I will consider some of the overarching and nuanced processes that have contributed to the positions and actions of staff and pupils at Metropolitan High in defining academic success and who becomes academically successful. I have found the Bourdieuan concepts of field, habitus and capital especially useful in exploring and articulating these processes. I describe each of these concepts in turn and offer an overview and critique of some of the ways in which they have been employed in broader research. In the remainder of the chapter, I discuss my adaptation rather than explicit adoption (see Reay, 1996 cited in Connolly,

1998) of Bourdieu in relation to an analysis of the macro and micro processes at play in the development and redevelopment of the academically successful pupil. I close by considering the implications of this analysis for the attainment of Black students within the British education system and for the wider social justice agenda.

Bourdieu – overview of key concepts

In identifying a theory that would help make sense of the discourses and practices surrounding academically successful pupils, there were two key issues that I sought to reflect. First, the relative powerlessness of the pupils within the decisive and allegedly predictive teacher discourses of academic success indicated, in my mind, the strong role of the structural demands of the education system. At the same time, however, it was clear that the pupils themselves were not simply voiceless, passive recipients of the instructions of this system and the demands made of them¹. They had, within reason, some degree of choice or agency in terms, for example, of the ways in which they chose to adhere to rules on school uniform or, indeed, readjust their clothing once admonished by staff for wearing it inappropriately. My desire to give consideration to both structural and individual positioning drew my attention to the work of Bourdieu for whom overcoming the subjective-objective is central to his writings:

“[Bourdieu] sought to develop a concept of agent free from the voluntarism and idealism of subjectivist accounts and a concept of social space free from the deterministic and mechanistic causality...” Johnson (1993: 4)

There have been three fundamental concepts of Bourdieu's work considered important in the production and reproduction of varying strata and inequalities of social class²: that of field; habitus and, capital. I offer only an introduction to these concepts here, as they will be considered in greater detail in the following section in the context of the findings about academic success.

Field

Briefly, the field is a social space; the site of social action. It is governed by particular ways of functioning, which simultaneously serve as boundaries distinguishing one field from another. To gain and, arguably, to retain membership of a particular field requires of individuals, knowledge of an enormous amount of information. Bourdieu uses the field of art to illustrate this point:

¹ The same can, of course, be said of staff at Met., who are differentially located as subjugated recipients of the prevailing norms and regulations of the wider education system (implemented through central government) but simultaneously occupy positions of power and decision-making within the localised context of the school.

² Along with Reay (1998) and Connolly (1998), I make the argument that these tools are also useful for examining inequalities by gender and ethnicity although they were originally developed in relation to class inequalities.

"It is difficult to conceive of the vast amount of information which is linked to membership of a field and which all contemporaries immediately invest their reading of works: information about institutions – e.g. academies, journals, magazines, galleries, publishers, etc. and about persons, their relationships, liaisons and quarrels, information about the ideas and problems which are 'in the air' and circulate orally in gossip and rumour." Bourdieu (1993:32)

Part of the challenge for members of the field is to understand and learn which academies, journals or magazines - to continue to use art as an example - have the most currency so that they are regarded as having legitimacy within the field. However, inequality arises since, Bourdieu contends, what is and what is not given value is decided by the dominant groups³ within the field. Further, these "systems of domination" (Johnson, 1993: 2) express themselves in virtually all the values and statuses assigned to social action and resources in the field but, significantly, these values are *arbitrary* in that they are socially imposed and do not represent any degree of absoluteness or intrinsic truth. The field, therefore, becomes a site of tension, and in some cases conflict, where subjugated or dominated groups struggle to access power through resources and dominant groups grapple to maintain it.

Habitus

Each individual carries with them a social class-based set of orientations (Dumais, 2002) or "set of dispositions which generate practices and perceptions" which guide their actions and behaviour in the field, in ways which are not always predetermined or calculated (Bourdieu, 1993). Bourdieu refers to this as the *habitus*. The habitus influences the actions of the individual and what they believe is and is not possible based on their place in the social structure, thus supporting the reproduction of class based inequalities (see for example Willis, 1977). However, the concept of habitus has been criticised for being overly deterministic and fatalistic (Nash, 1990) and for failing to explain anomalies where individuals have achieved beyond the expectations (or limitations) of their habitus (Moore, 2004). In response, Bourdieu suggests that individuals can exercise strategic choice and "conscious deliberation" and thus move beyond the influence of their habitus through critical self-reflection and becoming aware of its impact. This is most likely to occur in times of crisis or when there has been a major disruption to everyday practice and action (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).

So individuals operate within the field according to their habitus or mindset. It is the habitus which shapes how they will make use of the resources that are available to them and negotiate, successfully, the rules of the field.

³ Dominant groups are concerned with maintaining their positions of power and Bourdieu maintains that they do this by encouraging the production and reproduction of "appropriate" social action (Moore, 2004).

Capital

Capital refers to the set of usable resources and powers available to each individual within the field (Bourdieu, 1986b). It might be best understood as a form of social currency or a social product of the field. There are three key forms of capital: economic, cultural and social. *Social capital* relates to:

“membership in a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively owned capital, a “credential” which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word.” (Bourdieu, 1986b: 248)

Cultural capital is described as relating to “forms of cultural knowledge, competences or dispositions”. It is important to understand that Bourdieu is rejecting culture in its “restricted, normative sense of ordinary usage” and embraces a broader meaning based on the “anthropological” relating to human practice and way of being (Bourdieu, 1986a). Finally, *economic capital* refers to that which is “immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalised in the form of property rights” (Bourdieu, 1986b).

Individuals enter the education field with differing amounts of capital depending, for example, on family background and upbringing or family connections. Cultural capital itself, can exist in three forms: the *embodied state* “in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and the body”, that is things that “decline and die with its bearer” (Bourdieu, 1986b: 245) such as accent, disposition, way of walking”; *objectified state* in the form of cultural goods, such as pictures, books, music; and, the *institutionalised state* which reflects qualifications and institutionally sanctioned forms of status (Bourdieu, 1986a; Grenfell & James, 1998).

Bourdieu in practice

With regards to the current research, I am particularly interested in the formation of cultural capital and the role it plays in legitimising and perpetuating particular cultural practices and “modes of consumption” (Bourdieu 1993: 37). Bourdieu frequently speaks of these forms of social action in relation to art and literature (see for example Bourdieu, 1986a) and the differences evident between different social classes. Reflecting on staff discourse about the rejection of various forms of dress associated with street culture (see Chapter 6: Dress and Demeanour), I will show how their beliefs are heavily influenced by wider societal discourse. I draw, in particular on one of their examples, the hooded top, to show how the media has come to influence public taste and consumption. I show that these same practices are reflected within the staff discourses and action at Metropolitan High. First, I offer a brief critical examination of some of the ways that Bourdieu has been used in practice.

Although one of the criticisms levelled at Bourdieu's work has been its overarching focus on social class inequalities (see for example Shilling, 2004: 485), a small body of academic research has sought to demonstrate, quantitatively, its validity in relating to the differential educational attainment of some ethnic groups, with inconsistent results. This variation, I would argue, has been primarily due to the various ways that cultural capital has been interpreted and subsequently assessed and measured. For example, Driessen (2001: 515) adopts what can be considered a limited reading of Bourdieu in arguing that the "less favorable (sic) educational position of [children from the lower social] groups" is a direct result of the "primary socialization within the family and upbringing by parents". This positioning is used as the basis of a study which takes as its measure of cultural capital linguistic resources, reading behaviour and "pedagogical family climate" in Dutch, Surinamese and Antillean, Turkish and Moroccan families and attempts to determine the extent to which proficiency in these variables affects educational attainment. The results indicate that there was no "mediating effect of resources within the various ethnic groups" (p. 534); that is the extent to which pupils engaged in these linguistic resources did not have an impact on their achievement within particular groups. Language proficiency was found to have some impact on achievement. These results are hardly surprising bearing in mind that the forms of cultural capital were defined *a priori* by the researcher so in effect the results reflect a test of what he has determined as having legitimacy. Further, the quantitative nature of the study also means that little is known of the experiences and views of the participants themselves and their access to other salient forms of capital that might have contributed to the negative findings.

A similar, restrictive approach to thinking about cultural capital is adopted by Kalmijn & Kraaykamp (1996). Using variables from the Survey of Public Participation in Arts, namely classical music, theatre productions, art museum attendance and reading (excluding of school books) they seek to examine whether increased participation in these activities has a direct positive effect on narrowing the Black-White educational achievement gap. In response to their findings they conclude that:

"By showing that cultural capital explains part of the Black-White convergence in schooling, we illustrated that cultural capital may also serve as a route to upward mobility for less privileged groups in society." p33

This is a highly problematic analysis in that the authors do not interrogate the inequity of the value *arbitrarily* inscribed in the forms of capital they are measuring, regarding them instead as scientifically proven activities of high worth. Nor do they consider the monocultural ethos of the institutions where many of these activities take place and the practices which they employ which might exclude many minority ethnic groups, for example, by advertising events in arenas with limited or exclusive readership. Rather, Kalmijn & Kraaykamp commit to the "model of

resistance" (p.25) espoused by DiMaggio and Ostrower (1990) whom they cite, which portends that despite making significant gains in income, education and intermarriage "Blacks have *remained attached to* traditional Black art forms to maintain their cultural identity" [emphasis added, p. 25]. The argument for resistance is made because "Whites" have "become integrated into traditional Black culture". Such a perspective unfortunately fails to take into account the different histories of the two ethnic groups and the way in which the behaviour of the former has been identified as the standard norm against which the behaviour and actions of other ethnic groups should be judged.

In relation to both of these studies, I contend that consideration must be paid to the rules and influences of the social space or field in which the cultural capital is being struggled over. In the case of Driessen (2001) the analysis would have benefited from an understanding of the school context in which the pupils were situated or, at least as I have already maintained, a focus on the personalised discourses or habitus of the participants themselves (see Reay, 1998). Both studies readily subscribe to deterministic interpretations of identity and ethnicity in locating minority ethnic groups in question as complicit in shaping not only their own subjugated positions but also those of the majority ethnic groups. Reay (1998; 61) makes the point well when, in discussing the role of Bourdieu's work in the formation of gendered habitus, she argues that the gendered habitus can be also seen as "*constitutive of*, rather than determined by social structures" [emphasis added]. I suggest that a similar viewpoint can be adopted in relation to inequalities by ethnicity.

Also overlooked in both studies, as demonstrated by the selection of specific variables seen to constitute cultural capital, is the need to recognise that what is defined as possessing currency will vary according to the specific temporal and spatial location of the field in question (Giddens, 1985 cited in Connolly, 1998) and, according to what the dominant group assigns as having legitimacy. This is a point emphasised by Bourdieu himself whose fundamental observations and analysis regarding cultural capital were based on the distinct cultural practices of French society (see Bourdieu, 1986a). One of the strengths of this thesis is that it takes as its starting point the perceptions and actions of the staff and pupils themselves in determining how *they* define and shape academic success and hence what behaviours and practices *they* consider have legitimacy.

Bourdieu at Metropolitan High

I want to contextualise my reading of Bourdieu within the site of Metropolitan High and the discourses and practices that support the construction of the academically successful pupil. I will do this in two principal ways: first, by considering the position of Met. both within the wider

education system and at a localised level and; second, by demonstrating how wider societal discourses about “unacceptable” forms of dress and demeanour, perpetuated through the media, contribute to teacher discourses on defining and reinforcing the construction of the academically successful pupil.

The relationship between Metropolitan High, the local context and central government

The social space occupied by Metropolitan High can be construed as a *field*, representative of the objective world, within which a number of smaller fields operate, for example, at the teacher and pupil level but also at the levels of ethnicity and gender. In order to retain legitimate membership of the wider field of the education system, Metropolitan High is required to subscribe to the rules of that system. This is most clearly demonstrated through its struggle to meet the demands of central government to increase the percentage of pupils achieving academic success in terms of the acquisition of five or more A* to C grades at GCSE (see Chapters 4 and 8 for further discussion of this point). I revealed how this caused a degree of tension for some Met. staff who while critiquing the legitimacy of and often distancing themselves from this government definition of academic success expressed a disdain for other local schools that took membership to the field (and hence the rules) seriously but, in what might be considered a contradiction, nonetheless employed its own tactics to ensure A* to C grade success. Such criticism was articulated through comments about the selection procedures and the catchment area of both Metropolitan High itself and the other schools with which it felt it was in competition:

“...a lot of the children in the area are creamed by other schools erm because we still have grammar schools, call them what you will erm, you see one over there [*points through the window*] where the nice girls go? Selective, though they pretend not to be. So we don't get first pick, if we get able children, it's sort of by chance really.” Mr Condon (Maths teacher)

Through this comment, Mr Condon reveals something of the tension involved in Met.'s striving to retain what it regards as honest or genuine membership of the marketplace that the education system represents. It further indicates that different types of pupil are viewed as having capital of benefit to the survival of the school as a legitimate player within this marketplace. The reference to “nice girls” not only includes these particular pupils as “desirable” (Youdell, 2003) but, consistent with the findings of this thesis about the identity of the academically successful pupil, simultaneously *excludes* boys and, certain girls who are not readily perceived as “nice”!

A similar argument can be made from the opposite paradigm where not only is Met. unlikely to attract ‘high value’ pupils but, according to staff, it is more likely to attract those with poor capital

or, in other words, pupils unable to help it to (easily) retain comfortable membership of the wider education field:

"We've got a lot of kids with special needs, which we cater for, yet if you've got a kid with special needs, in terms of your year groups that's going to bring your average, pass rate down 'cos they're not going to get five A to Cs..." Mr Brown (Maths teacher)

This perception did not simply apply to pupils with SEN, as I have demonstrated in previous chapters, since perceptions about the broad selection process and the catchment area - "We take all comers here; we'll take everybody and anybody", Mr Brown, Maths teacher - contributed to an overall discourse that situated some pupils as more likely of academic success than others. In this way, Metropolitan High can be understood to exist in a state of flux and constant tension as it battles, on one hand, to demonstrate its fitness to survive within the education field and, on the other, as it attempts to marry this desire for a comfortable, healthy existence with a pupil intake that is not regarded as fit for purpose. I want now to turn to an examination of wider societal discourse about "unacceptable" forms of dress as perpetuated via the media and show how these messages are uncritically adopted by many school staff in influencing their definitions and subsequent treatment of the academically successful pupil.

Ethnicised subcultural practices and the media

The current research took place over three terms between January 2002 and January 2003 although contact with the school extended well beyond either side of this period in terms of making initial contact and providing updates on the analysis of the findings (see Chapter 3: Methodology). While a particular moral panic over the hooded top⁴ occurred after the main research period, I contend that the fears and discomforts aroused through these heightened phases of reporting are only muted and never completely silenced or absent from media discourse or the individual subconscious.

Between November 2002 and December 2005, the hooded top⁵, baseball caps and their wearers received heightened attention in widespread British media. In November 2002, for example, BBC Radio 4 aired a brief feature during the Today programme which commonly airs to in the region of 2.2 million listeners⁶, in which a senior medical consultant enunciated his campaign for baseball caps to be banned from his hospital on the grounds that it was, in his view, the "start of a chain of uncivil behaviour that *leads directly* to assaulting doctors and nurses" [emphasis added]. While this was an informal, light-hearted item, including the views of

⁴ While Met. students were expected to wear full school uniform as described in the prospectus, the hooded top, along with caps and bandanas, commonly formed part of staff discourse about the 'threatening' dress of less academically successful pupils (see Chapter 6 for detailed discussion).

⁵ Commonly referred to as "hoody" or "hoodie".

⁶ www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/today/about/40years/page2.shtml (accessed 03/02/06)

a fashion stylist who countered that caps by themselves were not aggressive, as was being implied, a clear message had been conveyed about a potential link between caps, cap wearers and undesirable behaviour. This association magnified when, in announcing new anti-social behaviour laws in May 2005, British Prime Minister Tony Blair, gave support to the Bluewater shopping centre's ban on hooded tops and caps. In an article entitled "PM attacks yob culture and pledges to help bring back respect", The Guardian reported Mr Blair's "personal endorsement" of action against the "wearing of *threatening* hoods by teenage boys" (The Guardian, 13 May 2005) [emphasis added]. Personifying the garment in this way facilitates its symbolisation as an object of fear so that eventually, its mere mention or representation will evoke the emotional response with which it was initially connected, a point exemplified by Cohen (2002:28) when describing public response to Mexican American youth during the Los Angeles riots of 1943:

"References to this group were made in such a way as to strip key symbols (differences in fashion, life style and entertainment) from their favourable or neutral connotations until they came to evoke unambiguously unfavourable feeling."

Of course, personification was not the only way in which the hooded top became a symbol of deviance and general malevolence. In the weeks following the Bluewater/Prime Minister headlines, the hooded clothing of perpetrators received sudden frequent mention in articles relating to criminal activity, for example: "British pensioner shot dead at Spanish home by hooded gang⁷", The Observer, 15 May 2005; "Hoody Robbery", Daily Mirror, 24 May 2005; "Reclaim our streets: hoodies jail plea", Daily Mirror, 23 May 2005. I argue that these "value-inculcating and value-imposing" (Bourdieu, 1986a: 23) practices contribute to the presentation and re-presentation of the hooded top as a stand-alone signifier of malice.

Therefore, along with personification this visual and symbolic association, necessary in the "mass communication of stereotypes", (Cohen, 2002:27), contributed to the eventual demise of the hooded top's innocence. Consider, for example, the following photograph featured in The Sunday Times in a special report entitled "The Ghetto's in the Mind" (Appleyard & White, 2004).

⁷ The almost fleeting but extremely powerful coding conveyed here cannot be left without comment. This is a gruesome attack but the sensitivities of the reader are further stimulated mention of the nationality (personalising the attack to British readers) and age (their pensioner-status conveying both vulnerability and innocence) of the victims in contrast to the characterless profile of the gang, about whom we only know they wore the now confirmed symbol of deviance, the hood.

IMAGE REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES



Fig. 9.1 Hooded figures, Sunday Times article *source: Appleyard & White (2004)*

The photograph was part of a four page spread featuring members of the Black community identified as “prominent” by the Sunday Times, commenting on some of the educational and social problems faced by young Black people, mainly young Black boys, in the UK. This particular image (Fig. 9.1) occupied the centre of one double page with the text, headed “Crime Watch” in the bottom right hand corner alerting the reader to some alarming law and mental health statistics related to Black people. The reader is led to believe that the photograph depicts Black boys but in reality their facelessness means that these are depersonalised, dehumanised individuals without an ethnicity or even gender, serving to alienate Black boys (who they are supposed to represent) from the middle class gaze of the Sunday Times reader. This alienation is further dramatised by the dominating presence of the hoods, emphasised by the camera

angle⁸ and the contrasting brightness of the blue sky, ultimately contributing to an overall image of menace, threat and intimidation. In this way, simply portraying the hooded top, strategically manipulated through photographic skill, is enough to convey a message without the need for words.

The media plays, therefore, a strategic and often *misrecognised* role⁹, that is its power and impact is frequently unbeknown to members of society, in influencing individual "tastes", in shaping what constitutes and what does not constitute "legitimate culture" and, consequently, what does and does not have "economic currency" in society (Bourdieu, 1986a).

Individuals can, I suggest, occupy a number of fields at different times and the beliefs and tastes which shape their habitus will infiltrate and shape their actions in different fields. In this way, wider media discourse about the "characteristics" of the hooded top are not restricted to that field but, along with other elements of ethnicised subculture that Met. teachers referred to, contribute to their judgements about pupils in their school. In other words, the hooded top that became associated with antisocial behaviour outside the school gates, retains its deviant status with the field of the school, so that pupils so attired are subject to a heightened suspicious surveillance and increased likelihood of reprimand. This borrowing of meaning from one field to another is nicely conveyed by a number of media reports about various schools across England and Wales and a London college¹⁰, who had suddenly banned not just hooded tops but any attire that covered the head (Andalo, 2005; Deal, 2005). It is in this context that the teacher discourses about forms of "unacceptable" dress at Metropolitan High, which I showed also included any garment with a Nike label and baseball caps, needs to be understood.

However, I want to go one step further in this discussion of legitimate and illegitimate culture by using Bourdieu's notion of embodied capital to argue that skin colour, in this case Black skin, with all that it has represented historically¹¹ and continues to represent in contemporary

⁸ The camera is situated below the figures, trained up towards their faces. This gives the impression that the boys are standing over the reader, contributing to an image of imposition and, therefore, fear.

⁹ "Misrecognition" relates to the Bourdieuan term "*méconnaissance*" and "relates to the ways (...) underlying processes and generating structures of fields are not consciously acknowledged in terms of the social differentiation they perpetuate, often in the name of democracy and equality" (Grenfell & James, 1998: 23)

¹⁰ Staff and undergraduates at London's Imperial College were forbidden from wearing hooded tops or hijabs that covered their faces (Muslim head covering) because it conflicted with security regulations.

¹¹ For a for a fascinating historical account of the negativity associated with Black skin and the process of stereotyping in relation to Black Africans see Lowe (2005) and Casares (2005). The latter cites the following extract as a powerful example of the inferior status read into Black skin. It is taken from the testament of a widow, dated 1566, who leaves her estate to two Black siblings writing:

"The colour of their faces gives rise to the suspicion that they are slaves, but I say and declare that they are not, and that they have never been but free people."

Casares, (2005: 252)

society¹², albeit in different forms, can be regarded as a form of capital along with the embodiments of accent and way of walking. While racialised discourse was not *explicit* in the staff definitions of the academically successful student, it was *implicit* in the identifiers of academic success through references to ethnicised student subcultures, family composition and markers of poverty (for similar argument see also Connolly, 1998:94; Apple, 1999). There is also evidence that the behaviour of Black male pupils was reconstituted as problematic and a threat on account of their physicality thus making them, I argue, objects of heightened surveillance:

“...when he first came in - I went to his primary school - he was a *delightful little* boy and this is gonna sound really ridiculous perhaps but he became *very very tall very quickly* and he stood out and I think that that's when he began to try to be a bit of a...a bit of a mover.” Mrs Wright (Senior Management)¹³

I want to consider now how the field can represent, as Bourdieu explains, a site of discord and conflict and continue to use the recent history of the hooded top to elucidate my argument. While there were some thoughtful articles in the newspaper broadsheets critiquing the unquestioned moral decline of the hooded top (for example see Barbieri, 2004; Rumbold, 2004), one of the most creative and impassioned, was the online campaign to “savethehoodie” initiated by grime artist¹⁴ Lady Sovereign¹⁵. Her petition¹⁶ which can be viewed as a form of resistance¹⁷ to the arbitrary denigration of the hooded top (articulated via mainstream media) features the emblazoned trade marked caption of “Save The Hoodie” above a text that urges fellow “hoodie” wearers to “Stand up for your rights!” She points to the contradictions of societal symbolisation by making the compelling argument:

“Mother f***ers dont (sic) have a clue do they? How can they sell them in the shopping centres but then not let them in!”

Of particular relevance to the argument I am making here about illegitimate cultural practices and their relation to young Black people is Lowe's (2005) description of the way in which the stereotyping of Black Africans extended to appearance so that methods of adornment traditionally practised by captured Black Africans, such as the wearing of gold-hooped ear-rings and certain bodily markings, came to embody symbolic representations of inferiority and Blackness (p.24, 25).

¹² I refer, for example, to the sexualised portrayal of the Black model in the Soho scene on the cover of Time Out magazine (see Footnote 18) and, the fear and threat evoked through the Sunday Times photograph already discussed (also see Gilman, 1999).

¹³ See Chapter 6, Dress and Demeanour, p.90 for detailed analysis of this quote.

¹⁴ “Grime” is a street musical artform similar to hiphop.

¹⁵ Lady Sovereign's debut single was entitled “Hoodie”. Of course, the “campaign”, website and related features can also be viewed as part of a highly strategic PR exercise giving both Lady Sovereign and her single heightened publicity.

¹⁶ See Appendix 6 for full press release giving details of the campaign.

¹⁷ Of course, the “campaign”, website and related features can also be viewed as part of a highly strategic PR exercise giving both Lady Sovereign and her single heightened publicity.

In this press release, the dichotomy between those in power, who have constructed the hooded top as imbued with unquestioned negativity, and the actual hooded wearer is very apparent as Lady Sovereign attempts to realign its status as a simple item of clothing without such meaning. In so doing, she (as part of a subjugated group) promises to take the petition to Downing Street to "show the people in power that we have our fashion rights and they cannot dictate how we dress". The conflict over uniform wearing at Metropolitan High can be viewed as a struggle in the same way, between dominant (staff) and dominated (pupils) groups:

"I don't like Mr Condon our Maths teacher because when you go into the classroom, erm, you have to sit down, take off our coats and then we all have to stand up and he makes us...our ties have to be strangling us and our shirts have to be tucked in and our top button has to be done up as well. He does that every lesson and if it is not done then we can't sit down. I don't think there is any need to be doing that, especially in Year 11, he should just let us sit down and get on with the work." Michael McNamara (Year 11, Black Caribbean)

It was not only forms of dress that staff at Metropolitan High regarded as illegitimate within the school context (see Chapter 6). A similar, though less sophisticated stereotype than that around the hooded top has built up around rap music which is denigrated as not only advocating violence and sexually explicit behaviour¹⁸ but as unequivocally perpetuating an anti-school "culture". Black BBC sports presenter and former Tottenham Hotspur striker Garth Crooks, speaking at the annual London Schools and the Black Child conference in 2004, was reported as making the reference¹⁹ to a "*direct link* between films and rap music glorifying violence and the drift of black boys away from education and into crime and violence" [emphasis added] (see also Sewell, 2000 for similar association). This is similar to the position reflected by one of the teachers at Metropolitan High:

"(...) I just think sort of like the music that the kids listen to; it doesn't promote education and doing well. It's all about sex and drugs and that kind of thing. There's lots of swearing and cussing and I think they, erm, kids even though they don't realise it they sort of internalise that and it does come out. In their leisure time they're either listening to hip-hop and all the sort of rap and stuff that talk about all these kind of negative things and who is banging up who and it's just so much of that (...)" Ms Taylor (teacher)

¹⁸ The cover of the (18-25 January 2006) edition of Time Out, London's events' listing magazine featured a Black female model in a gold dress cut to reveal much of the upper thigh of one leg, with a blue feathered boa draped over one shoulder, in a scene set up to mirror the red-light district of Soho. The word "Soho" appeared in red neon-light style graphics down the left-hand side of the page with the right hand side listing the featured articles in a similar graphic font. The list read as follows: "sex, shops, food and folklore step inside London's hedonistic heartland", in red text followed by: "whisky, hiphop, Satanism, jazz", in blue text. Such association and portrayal maintains the formulation of hiphop as a debauched, immoral music form in the minds of not just the readers but the commuters to whom the image was readily available through newspaper stand advertisements (Appendix 7).

¹⁹ According to transcripts of his speech he actually asked "Is there equally a correlation between our children's behaviour, in and out of the classroom, and the things we allow them to watch and the music they listen to?" (for full transcript see: www.cre.gov.uk/Default.aspx?LocID=0hgnew03v&RefLocID=0hg00900c002.Lang-EN.htm accessed 07/03/06)

Evident in both sets of comments is an overt objectivity where merely listening to rap music is portrayed as negative, where it is stripped of any lyrical diversity and, a scientific causality is established between its listeners and an anti-school attitude. These are conclusions that lack any reflection or complexity in their analysis, failing to consider, for example, that not only do other ethnic groups share these cultural pastimes without similar consequences but, that not *all* Black boys who listen to rap become anti-school (Rollock, 2005).

So far, I have examined the powerful effect of media practice in shaping the “economy of cultural goods” (Bourdieu, 1986) and how this becomes part of the habitus of teachers at Met. and affects their judgement about acceptable forms of dress and pupil subculture. I have argued that these judgements influence the discourse that locates pupils as academically successful. How pupils themselves might choose to position themselves in relation to these discourses is discussed in the following section.

Pupils and academic success

One of my reasons for using Bourdieu as an analytical tool through which to view the findings of this research is because he has attempted to overcome the division between individual choice or agency and structure. Therefore, it can be said that while pupils at Met. were required to operate within the specific regulations of their school, they were able to exercise a certain degree of choice about the extent to which they did this either, for example, explicitly through their behaviour or in their views articulated during the course of the interview (see Grenfell & James, 1998). Beyond exploring and understanding teacher discourse and practice about academic success, I sought to also give voice to the perspectives of the pupils themselves and in so doing noted a stark difference between the two groups, not only in their definitions but in the way the pupils regarded academic success as open to all.

In order to develop earlier discussion that focused on the arbitrarily assigned illegitimacy of the hooded top, this section will examine pupils’ views on appearance, particularly in relation to school uniform. Of the male and female pupils who commented about appearance, there was a recognition of an association between dressing smartly (that is in neat, full correct uniform) and being identified as academically successful. Interestingly, however, the girls were more likely to positively identify with this interpretation as valid and desirable whereas the boys tended to reject the association as meaningless or, to borrow from Bourdieu, arbitrary:

- | | |
|-------------------|---|
| NR | "(...) 'Cos you're saying you can be academically successful and like have your shirt out (...)?" |
| Nathan
Johnson | (Year 11, Black African Caribbean) "Hmm, you can." |

- NR "So then I'm lost. Does that mean that you cannot do the school rules and still be academically successful?"
- Nathan "Yeah you can, you can. I think you can. As I said, it all boils down to your GCSEs, that's what I think and your level. It boils down to your GCSEs, what you achieve. And then you'll know how successful the person, how successful the student is."

So at the level of the teacher-pupil field, the extent to which uniform is tidy or meets school regulations is regarded, at least by Nathan as irrelevant to the definition and acquisition of academic success. It can be argued that while he correctly identifies any perceived relationship between appearance and academic performance as arbitrary, he *misrecognises* the coded significance and *symbolic value* that it represents to staff that is manifest through negative judgement and treatment. I assert that this misrecognition operates mainly, if not exclusively within the teacher-pupil field, since a different interpretation of the role of uniform adaptation existed within the pupil field (at least for some of the boys) where it was seen as a way of distancing oneself from the profile of the academically successful student in order to avoid teasing. This is in line with Bourdieu's notion that "dispositions that are given a negative value in the educational market may receive a very high value in other markets – not least, of course, in the relationships internal to the class" (Bourdieu, 1986b: 255). Of course, even if Met. staff were aware of this alternative purpose it does not automatically presuppose them to leniency or empathy. In any case, I would suggest that the status of inappropriate forms of dress were far too embedded within their habitus as to allow for alternative interpretations. This is demonstrated quite clearly in Chapter 6 where recent initiatives to improve uniform wearing not only led to increased surveillance but the unquestioned conclusion that this was directly responsible for an improvement in pupil behaviour (see Ms Hill, p.87) despite the simultaneous introduction of a range of additional initiatives.

It is interesting to note, that no such distinction in meaning about the role of uniform was evident amongst the successful Black girls who tended to mirror the type of explicit associations between smart appearance and academic success made by members of staff (see Chapter 6, Dress and Demeanour, p. 95). This would, at least partially, explain the fact that they featured less in staff accounts about dress, demeanour and pupil subcultures and would, therefore, have been seen as less of a threat to staff.

While I have made a distinction between the meaning of uniform within the teacher compared to pupil field, for some Black boys, I do not wish to suggest that these different meanings remain fixed and immutable within these fields. Instead, it is plausible that a fluidity of meaning and intention existed that overlapped between the different fields. That is to say, just as the codes inferred in adapting uniform served a (survival) purpose within the pupil field, these same codes

may also serve a purpose for some Black boys within the teacher-pupil field, for example, as a way of indicating some amount of status within an education context that has already situated them as low currency²⁰. Such an occurrence would be reflective of the complex dialectical relationship between the individual and the organising actions of the staff. Black boys could be said to both constitute their position and have their positions constituted by the structural relations of the field dictated by the social action of Met. school staff.

Racialised and gendered perspectives on academic success

I should, at this point, say something of the gendered and racialised focus of this study. Aware of the way in which the experiences and views of Black girls are often silenced or invisible in (academic and policy) research (see arguments, for example, by Mirza, 1986; Henry, 1998), I explicitly chose to include them in this research on academically successful students. Therefore, not only did I ensure that the pupil sample was roughly balanced with regards to gender but questions were also pursued about the role of gender in shaping the definitions and practice of academic success. As with the overall findings of the thesis, there were broad differences in the ways in which staff discourse was distinctly articulated around gender compared with the more neutral and less deterministic language of the pupils. In particular, I was struck by the consistent staff focus on *Black male* students whether in isolation as a group or mentioned in relation to other groups of pupils. Continuing to use Bourdieu, I want to draw attention to some key examples from the previous chapters of instances where there was heightened or particular reference to Black boys by teachers. Black girls tended to be largely absent from these staff debates. I will then say something about the patterns evident in wider society as portrayed via the media. In this way, I am adopting a slightly different approach to above, by concentrating on the field of the school first rather than the media but this should not be read as being indicative of any linear or causal relationship since, as I have already discussed above, the relationships and interactions between and within fields can be considered dialectical. Reference will also be made, where appropriate, to pupil evidence.

I have already explained (see Methodology) that I rarely made explicit reference to ethnicity during the fieldwork in attempt to pre-empt any personal sensitivities and discomfort on the part of the participants regarding a potentially controversial subject matter²¹. It was noticeable that while gender was, on occasion, mentioned in isolation when teamed with ethnicity the reference

²⁰ The educational failure of Black boys is now well-publicised. See Introduction and Literature Review for further discussion.

²¹ And, of course, to minimise any of my own views about race/ethnicity from overly influencing the direction of the research.

was overwhelmingly to Black boys. There was sparse mention of white boys and even less frequent comment on either white or Black girls:

"Well, yeah, I'm gonna say, let me see - academically successful – I am trying to think of the opposite to that. Yeah, you could find a real clean tidy looking girl but that wouldn't prove anything and you could see a clean tidy Afro-Caribbean boy and he could be the worse boy in the school [*chuckles*]. Mr Condon (teacher)

This is a particularly interesting comment from Mr Condon as not only is success affiliated with gender, that is being a girl, but it also carries with it racialised beliefs and assumptions specifically about being a *Black* boy. As I indicated in Chapter 6, the very mention of "Afro-Caribbean boy" compared to the ethnicity-less "girl" not only reveals something of the heightened visibility of these Black male students but simultaneously reflects their relative lack of status or capital within the wider discourse on academic success. This point is reiterated by the unexpected comment Ms Johnson made to me when, in answering her question about the focus of my research²², she began talking about Black boys and exclusions:

"[She says she is] curious as to why this is. Proffers [her own] question regarding culture, parenting/lack of support at home. Also mentioned clothes that sixth formers wear. Some of Black boys image – take it from America ([it is] not British culture). 'You see them with their jackets and those hoods pulled down over their heads and those things [bandanas] around their head. They might be innocent but *you* would cross the road if you saw them.' " Ms Johnson (Support staff, white female) [fieldnotes]

I have already discussed the way in which she implicates me, as a Black woman, in her remarks (see p.88). I suggest that this comment exemplifies some of the sophisticated nuances and subjectivities about gender and race where I have been situated as a Black woman with a certain degree of symbolic capital, exemplified by her perception that I will empathize with her analysis and fear, but where Black boys once again lack currency which is further devalued through the forms of illegitimate attire and practice that I made detailed reference to above. Black male students are further disadvantaged by the fears and perceptions surrounding their physicality, which positions them as a source of threat for many of the interviewed female members of staff. This is evidenced by the many comments about their height and the alleged speed of their physical development that was directly and uncritically linked to undesirable behaviour.

There are two key observations that can be made about these comments. First, the perceptions and beliefs about Black males, their physicality, their dress and demeanour, means they are likely to be subject to a larger degree of surveillance than other groups of pupils. Second, Black

²² I told her it was about the experiences of academically successful students. I made no mention of either exclusions or ethnicity.

girls are apparently absent from any of these discourses which, I would argue, indicates that a different set of beliefs and assumptions exist for them, in the interplay of what it means to be Black and female, in opposition to or at least beyond the fear, threat and visibility of their male counterparts (see Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1992). These findings and analysis support those of Connolly (1998) who argues that:

“(...) discourses on femininity help to downplay the emphasis on the volatile and aggressive nature of Black girls, while those on masculinity act to over-emphasise these characteristics for Black boys.” (p.15)

I have suggested that the pupils themselves are not merely passive victims of teacher perception and treatment, that they have a degree of, albeit limited, agency within the site of the school. While it is difficult to provide any detailed analysis about gender differences amongst Black pupils since they did not, compared with staff, make overly explicit gendered comments, at least one observation can be made. In analysing their comments, Black girls seemed more likely to hold the view that a neat and correct school uniform was desirable and connected to an academically successful image than did the boys. I have already explained that adapting school uniform may have served an additional survival function for Black boys to avoid being teased. As such, girls seemed less uncomfortable with and more understanding of the various checks employed by school staff to ensure pupils were wearing the correct uniform and wearing it appropriately.

These gendered and racialised beliefs and assumptions regarding Black male and females can be witnessed beyond the boundaries of the Metropolitan High field with the negative and stereotypical representations of both Black men and women now well-documented in various forms of media (see for example Young, 1996; Westwood, 1990; Hall, 1990). To draw attention to some of the varying discourses around Black males and females, I want to return, as an example, to the Sunday Times article referred to earlier. The article also featured a section on Black girls and while the written account about Black girls was considerably more positive than the section on the Black boys, it is on the photographs that I wish to focus attention since they tell a powerful story about Black males and Black females implicitly conveyed even to the casual browser of the magazine who has not taken the time to read the full account of the text.

The caption for the photograph, on which I wish to focus, reads “Dynamite Misses” with a subheading of “Articulate, aspirational and street-smart: black girls are driven to succeed” (see Fig. 9.2 below). While this wording positions Black girls as ambitious and capable of success (unlike their male counterparts in the previous pages), it nonetheless situates their behaviour as being viewed through a colonial gaze (see also hooks, 1991). The very mention of such adjectives (especially “articulate”, “aspirational”) highlights that these girls are seen to be

operating in an unexpected or unusual way, beyond conventional expectations for their group. They are still positioned as the Other. Yet, and this is an important point, these girls do not represent the fear and threat that is embedded in Figure 9.1. While there is a similar outdoor background, the photograph has been taken so that we, as the reader, are at eye level and within speaking distance of the girls.

IMAGE REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES



Fig. 9.2 Dynamite Misses, Sunday Times article. *source:* Appleyard & White (2004)

Their faces, unimpeded by the “criminality” of hooded tops, are visible and together with the fact that there are just two of them, compared with the threat of the group of “Black boys”, they are portrayed as approachable and even possibly amiable. Significantly, these two girls have also been given names “Brenda” and “Chanel” which further humanises them to the reader/observer (they were named by unseen mothers compared to the motherless Black boys who are not named) and further minimises them as objects of fear. This is just one example, but it is easy to see how such contrasting imagery of the threatening, identity-less Black boy and the approachable, hard-working, “articulate” Black girl can be paralleled and become embedded in the discourses of Metropolitan staff about Black male and Black female students. Indeed, the

ease with which it is possible to buy into the prevailing negative discourse was revealed in the way in which I found that even I, in my researcher role, began to react to one Black male participant, in line with the prevalent negative staff views (Chapter 6). These differential perceptions and positioning of Black male and Black female pupils, strongly suggests that the latter are more likely to be viewed as legitimate players within the educational context, and therefore more likely of academic success, than their Black male counterparts.

I will now pull these various positions and conflicts together to articulate not how Black pupils become academically successful as was the original intention when I began the research for this thesis but, to instead make the case that within a complex, deterministic framework of expectations about who can and cannot become academically successful, achieving academic success remains a challenge for Black pupils.

Defining and redefining academic success

In seeking to understand how staff and pupils at Metropolitan High school conceptualise success a number of important issues become apparent. First, staff exercise two versions of academic success namely, exclusive success: the acquisition of five or more A* to C grades at GCSE which due to the "poor quality" of pupils in its catchment area is not seen as easily obtainable and, inclusive success simply defined in terms of reaching one's potential. This latter success related to those students regarded as incapable of achieving success in "exclusive" academic terms. Second, staff at Met. described a distinction in the identity of the academically successful student compared to that of the student only deemed capable of achieving inclusive success. Finally, student definitions of academic success in no way reflected either an acknowledgement of or subscription to this teacher dichotomy in that they largely considered that anyone could be successful as long as they worked hard indicating also that they were unaware of the extra criteria by which they were being judged:

"In short, the property emphasized by the name used to designate a category, (...), is liable to mask the effect of all the secondary properties which, although constitutive of the property, are not expressly indicated." (Bourdieu, 1986: 103)

I contend that the existence of a higher status (exclusive) and lower status (inclusive) academic success alongside the perception of their direct link with the fixed identity of the academically successful and unsuccessful pupil significantly contributes to the continued production and reproduction of ethnic group inequality²³ within Metropolitan High school. Further, I make the

²³ I showed earlier how this inequality is interwoven with gender.

case that media discourse and heightened attention about illegitimate culture serves to exclude Black male pupils who are seen by staff to embody this illegitimacy via the youth subculture to which they subscribe.

The very *violence* perpetuated through these a priori notions of who can and cannot become academically successful is worsened by the fact that these categorisations and judgements are not made explicit demonstrated, for example, by the lack of evidence from the pupils. This misrepresentation or lack of clarity is a fundamental characteristic of the field and contributes to the ongoing production of inequality:

“...in any sphere of activity the defining principles are only ever partially articulated, and much of the orthodox way of thinking and acting passes in an implicit, tacit manner. Thus the legitimate is never made fully explicit.” (Grenfell & James, 1998: 20)

I have, so far, explained the dichotomy between exclusive and inclusive success and, the type of pupil regarded by Met. staff as likely of attaining one or the other of these. To conclude the analysis here would be both inaccurate and incomplete since it does not take account of the very important fact that 1) pupils chosen by this school to take part in the research were those identified as academically successful²⁴ and, following on from this, 2) some Black pupils at Metropolitan High did achieve academic success in explicitly exclusive terms²⁵. It could be said, that such pupils achieve academic success beyond the ‘confines’ of their habitus and beyond the structured restrictions of the field. I consider such cases in the next section.

When Black pupils succeed

In considering how, in light of the current evidence, some Black pupils are able to become academically successful I posit the argument that these discourses about inclusive and exclusive academic success and the practices of inclusion and exclusion in relation to pupils at Met. do not always operate in distinct predictive ways but are shaped by the particular habitus of individual teachers and those of individual pupils, the particular characteristics of the field and the degree of regulation within it. In addition, students’ likelihood of being construed and therefore treated as academically successful will depend not just on their possession of legitimate capital but on when and whether it is activated (see Lareau & McNamara Horvat, 1999). In order to make sense of this alongside the fact that some Black (male) students do succeed in exclusive terms, I maintain that staff definitions of academic success can be

²⁴ Based on SATS scores. See Chapter 3: Methodology.

²⁵ Of course there were the Black pupils selected by the school for inclusion in the research. They were not necessarily atypical of the wider Black student population as I observed many other Black students receive certificates for progress (although this might be subjectively defined) and achievement at the annual achievement evenings. For example, one Black male student (not involved in the present research) achieved A* and A grades at GCSE and was given a commendation of achievement at one of the achievement evenings I attended.

regarded as part of a continuum (see Fig. 9.3 below) with those possessing appropriate forms of capital at one end of the spectrum and their counterparts at the other.

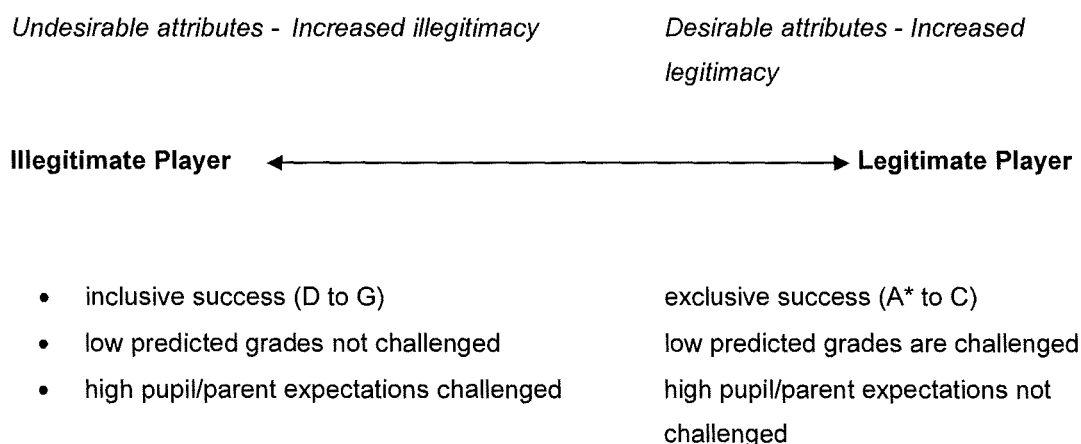


Fig. 9.3 Relationship between established pupil profile and predicted grades

In this continuum, the likelihood of a pupil being perceived as a legitimate player depends on the extent to which they fit the academically successful profile summarised in Fig. 7.1 in Chapter 7. The more closely they fit and perform this profile the more legitimacy (that is the further to the right they become situated in the above continuum) they will be seen as having and therefore of being able to achieve success in exclusive terms. The continuum provides a useful way of capturing staff discourse and also allows a degree of fluidity in pupil identities as they will not always fit the stark dichotomy presented in Fig. 7.1. A further advantage of this model is that it allows for pupils to be positioned according to the dynamic between both their own constituted identity and that constituted by members of staff. Part of the challenge for many of the pupils at Metropolitan High and especially pertinent for Black male pupils is that they are already classified as illegitimate players²⁶ before they officially enter the site of the school and therefore already considered more likely of low status inclusive success.

²⁶ Young (1996) argues that the challenge faced by young Black men can be regarded as a kind of modern day "symbolic slavery" where they are continually represented as damaged, disadvantaged and delinquent.

Chapter 10 – Discussion

In pulling together the main strands of this thesis I will in this final chapter first offer a summary of the key findings and then suggest a new way in which the debates regarding Black pupils and education might be articulated. I proceed to examine the strengths and limitations of the research before closing on not an overly optimistic note about the future.

Summary: Legitimate Players?

This research has sought to challenge prevalent discourse surrounding Black pupils as failing and disadvantaged by exploring the rarely examined area of the experiences of academically successful students. Using an ethnographic approach, I carried out a series of observations and interviews with staff and academically successful pupils from a range of ethnic groups at an inner-city London school fictitiously called Metropolitan High, over the course of three academic terms. There are three key findings. First, staff describe two distinct forms of success that I term exclusive success, relating to the acquisition of high status A* to C grades and inclusive success, that is relating to the acquisition of lower status, low grades. Second, staff also describe quite exact factors that they feel contribute to the construction or profile of the academically successful and less successful pupil. Third and finally, academically successful pupils while defining success in exclusive terms see it as attainable by all pupils once they are focused, motivated and diligent. They advise that clear, consistent disciplinary procedures, lessons that are delivered in creative, interesting ways by polite, respectful teachers would facilitate improved conditions for learning.

I make the argument that due to the complexity and fluidity of identities it is highly unlikely that pupils will always sit easily in one or other category as being simplistically positioned as either academically successful or less successful. I suggest, in Chapter 9, that these constructs can instead be regarded as part of a continuum and use Bourdieuan concepts to explain that pupils are seen as more *legitimate*, the closer they fit the successful profile and more *illegitimate*, the closer they fit the profile of the less successful pupil. In Bourdieuan terms, pupils who are most likely to be situated, according to staff, as having legitimacy are those with the appropriate success-facilitating capital. In other words, they come from the "right" sort of families, who value and demonstrate appropriately their value for education; they abide by school uniform regulations and do not highlight their individuality in the school (see Chapter 7, Fig 7.1). Successful pupils also have high value embodied capital. As I explained in the previous chapter, Bourdieu refers to embodied capital as dispositions that relate to the mind and body which die with their bearer (Bourdieu, 1986b: 245). In this way, gender and ethnicity can be classified as forms of embodied capital. This means being a girl for example, who many Met staff saw as

more likely to achieve academic success, means having a strong or high embodied currency. A similar analysis can be extended to pupils situated as possessing less academically successful capital. It is here that Black boys are especially disadvantaged in the fear and visibility they evoke in female staff. I also showed in Chapter 6 that forms of what these female staff describe as Black street culture, which included an interest in rap music, wearing hooded tops and Nike labelled clothing, have a particular low currency in terms of the dominant school discourse surrounding academic success.

While I problematize the misrecognised nature of the value judgements unquestioningly embedded in these various forms of capital it can equally be argued that Black pupils, boys can choose not to demonstrate or to borrow from Lareau, & McNamara Horvat (1999) "to activate" their capital where it will not have status. I wish to make the point that this choosing is, in fact, done with a purpose so that while some Black male pupils consciously buy into dominant school discourse around school uniform appropriation for example (see Curtis, Chapter 6; Sewell's Kelvin, 1999:82) others choose to do it because it has a particular status within the pupil field; that of enabling survival. Yet the most striking element of this analysis is that whether or not these pupils exercise their choice with regards to forms of clothing, they are nonetheless still seen as illegitimate players within the school field. I argue that due to the sexualised, historicised fear and stereotyped representation of Black males that is evident in the female staff accounts, that Black boys themselves on account of their ethnicity and gender are automatically positioned as possessing low embodied capital and therefore unlikely to ever achieve the all important high status exclusive success.

Culturalist versus Structuralist approaches: Another way

Research on the school experiences and educational performance of Black pupils has tended to attribute the reasons for their differential achievement to either intrinsic, cultural factors such as lack of motivation, poor valuing of education amongst family (e.g. Sewell, 2000b, 2000c; Foster, 1990) or, to the structural constraints of school organisation, governmental policy and teacher racism (see especially Gillborn, 1997; 1999; Gillborn & Youdell, 2000). I suggest that this dichotomy is too simplistic, that the complex interplay of pupil choice (albeit limited and inappropriately executed) alongside the hidden and arbitrary existence and execution of rules governing academic (exclusive) success provides evidence for a third way, for a culturalist *within* structuralism approach. This both reflects the magnitude of the structuralist argument as symbolised by imposing government policies and the existence of pervasive racisms and, the simultaneous but arguably less powerful co-existence of individual agency as pupils struggle to negotiate everyday challenges within various social spaces. This means that future debates regarding the school experiences of Black pupils should primarily seek to understand and address the ways in which structural factors shape schooling for these pupils but should also

pay heed to the ways in which Black (male) pupils themselves may inadvertently contribute to their own negative positioning as they attempt to negotiate their school existence (see below). Importantly, this new paradigm will help move debate beyond a solely structural approach in which Black pupils can be reduced to victim, without choice and, beyond an exclusively culturalist perspective which has tended to denounce the powerful role and influential of policy and racism and simplistically contributed to the pathologising of Black pupils and their families. The culturalism within structuralism paradigm represents another way.

Key Strengths & Limitations of present research

Clearly the findings of this research would have benefited from classroom observation as a way of providing further evidence in support of the interview data. However, I have already explained the access limitations imposed early on in the fieldwork by the headteacher at Metropolitan High and, in some ways due to this restriction I made particular use of the sites that were available (made accessible) for me to observe. Partly as a result of this I did not ask staff about their views about the specific academically successful pupils that I interviewed. I also did not collect the GCSE/GNVQ results of all of the Year 11 pupils who were interviewed since this would have required an extra negotiation of consent at a stressful period in the school calendar. I did learn, however, that Nathan did not pass (C or above) any of his GCSEs and that of the 32 subjects taken amongst four of the Black girls, passes were achieved in 24 subjects. It might be useful to replicate this research with staff and an identified group of successful Black boys and girls and track and observe their school experiences over an extended period of time and also monitor their grades at the end of Key Stage 4 to see how their experiences shape their final outcome.

I described in the Methodology section (Chapter 3) that a key criticism levelled at ethnography is that the findings are often based on subjective interpretations of the data. I have borne this in mind throughout and provided frequent evidence of direct comments and observations so that the reader can also draw their own conclusions. Further, I have attempted where possible to not simply to make explicit my own possible biases (e.g. with Nathan, Chapter 6) but also offered where it has seemed relevant (and I accept that this in itself is subjectively informed) the various ways in which analysis could have been performed. In addition, I would strongly argue for the validity of these findings not just based on their own strength but because they provide a convincing argument for the existence of the current educational situation regarding Black pupils (see Literature Review) and, because they support and build on existing ethnographic research by Youdell (2003) who argues that the identities and bodies of African Caribbean pupils become constituted as undesirable with regards to the dominant discourse of the school and Becker's notion of the "ideal client" based on teachers treatment of pupils based on social class differences (Becker, 1952). However, this research is unique in seeking to prioritise academic success amongst Black pupils and, simultaneously demonstrating the challenge that this can

present. It also offers, for the first time, a new way of contextualising the debates about Black pupils and education in terms of a culturalism within structuralism paradigm.

The Future: Achieving real academic success?

To offer ideas about how these findings might be viewed in a future context is not straightforward bearing in mind that they are based on a sophisticated analysis regarding the very structure and organisation of society, the influential role of the media in maintaining that organisation, alongside historical and contemporary representations of Blackness and Black males as well as some of the ways that these have shaped individual discursive practice. One approach might begin by challenging what is and is not readily categorised as having legitimacy within the media but also within English schools. This would involve some degree of genuine critical self-reflection on the part of teachers both during teacher training and, crucially, while in practice. I would also argue that a similar process needs to be encouraged at pupil level so that they, Black males in particular, become more sensitive to the symbolic action that shapes their treatment. To continue an education system where the parties are ignorant of the consequences of their actions (and judgements) is a system which is doomed to repeat the same inequalities of educational attainment.

A similar reflection is required at the level of the wider education system, in terms of an analysis of the *misrecognised* meanings implicit in references to "high expectations" and "reaching one's potential" frequently embedded in policy discourse about academic success (see for example Ofsted, 1999:18; Cabinet Office, 2003: 56; DfES, 2003a: 4; DfES, 2004c:45). As I showed, these terms were commonly employed by staff at Met. in their descriptions of academic success and hid, in their desperate bid to be seen to be achieving in accordance with the A* to C economy (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000), hierarchical assumptions about which specific form of academic success was available to whom. I would wager, therefore, that any education policy that stresses stratification between forms of academic success will result in particularly disastrous consequences for Black pupils and Black boys in particular. The Gifted and Talented¹ strand of the Excellence in Cities programme is one very good example of this having been found, especially in the early days of implementation to be benefiting white middle class pupils rather than those from poorer backgrounds that it was intended to serve. This research by Kendall, Rutt & Schagen (2005) found that pupils from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds were considerably less likely to be identified for inclusion to the programme compared to their "White UK" counterparts. While Deborah Eyre, Director of the National Association for Gifted

¹ DfES criteria defines "gifted" pupils as those having "particular academic ability in one or more subjects in the statutory school curriculum, other than art, music and PE" and "talented" pupils as those having "aptitude in the arts or sports" (www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/giftedandtalented - The Identification of the Gifted and Talented Cohort. Accessed 24/02/06)

and Talented Youth (NAGTY) has recently argued for the inclusive nature of the Gifted and Talented programme (Sanders, 2006) I suggest that the planned introduction of a national Gifted and Talented register and the expansion of the programme (DfES, 2005c) will only increase the pressure on schools to identify and position pupils according to these stark criteria and therefore further increase the position of disadvantage that many Black pupils already occupy. I would further predict, drawing from the findings of this thesis, that “gifted” will become associated with a high status exclusive success, which I showed was seen as only available to certain pupils and “talented” will refer to a low status, inclusive success available to those seen as unable to ever achieve success in exclusive terms.

My conclusions about what a Bourdieuan lens offers in terms of a predictive glimpse into the future are not especially optimistic. Essentially, for Black pupils to have a genuinely equitable chance of achieving high status success all parties, that is pupils, staff and central government, would be required to move beyond the determinism of their present thinking and beyond the practices and actions that are seen as part of normal education discourse around forms of success and pupil identities, so that Black pupils, become seen as legitimate players within the school field. As the historical context concerning Black pupils and educational achievement would suggest, encouraging definitive and far-reaching policy change in this context would remain a challenge since:

“the most privileged individuals, (...) remain most attached to the former state of affairs, [and are] the slowest to understand the need to change strategy and so to fall victim to their own privilege”. Bourdieu (1986: 24)

In a bold attempt to end this thesis on a slightly more optimistic note, I would suggest that there are some possibilities for future research to make a contribution to the destabilising this “state of affairs” by highlighting the way in which staff constructions, treatment and expectations about pupils are embedded in ethnicised discourse based on stereotypes and the various ways in which this can affect their academic success (see for example Archer & Francis, 2005) who demonstrate this in relation to Chinese pupils). Similar research could be carried out with other groups who do not perform well academically and where policy has broadly failed to offer recommendations leading to significant change. This might include, for example, pupils from Bangladeshi, Pakistani and white working class backgrounds to examine both how they perceive the educational context and their treatment and also how staff view them. Such research would be of particular interest regarding pupils from Traveller backgrounds whose personal views and experiences are largely absent from debates on educational attainment.

I am particularly interested in the way some of the academically successful Black boys in this research spoke of adapting their uniform in order to distance themselves from the profile of the

academically successful student as a means of survival within the pupil field. While there may of course be a number of additional explanations it is possible that knowing this information would position these boys differently in the eyes of their teachers and as less likely to receive reprimand. Clearly, understanding further school based pupil survival strategies would be a useful focus for future research.

In addition, my research has focused in depth on one school but in order to make a greater impact on educational policy I would suggest its replication across a greater range of schools with varying catchment areas which would help demonstrate how constructions about identity and success operate in different fields but ultimately and depressingly to the same end.

Since beginning this research, my views about Black pupils and academic success have shifted somewhat. My initial optimistic sheen has become tainted with dismay at the sheer extent and complexity of the "science of stereotypification" (Williams, 1997) that surrounds Black (male) pupils. The amount of work for those genuinely committed to equity is vast and I believe that it is only through shedding light on some of the arbitrarily assigned and misrecognised values and practices in schooling, the education system and wider society and by revealing how they operate to disadvantage Black pupils (and other minority ethnic groups) can British Prime Minister Tony Blair's vision for "a country where hard work and merit not privilege or background determine success" genuinely become a reality (Blair, 2005).

"You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view – until you climb into his skin and walk around in it."

Harper Lee (1960:35)

References

- Adi, H. (1995) *The History of African and Caribbean communities in Britain*. Hove, East Sussex: Wayland Publishers Limited
- Alderman, G. (2001) Opinion. *The Guardian*, 6 February
- Andalo, D. (2005) Welsh school bans hoodies. *The Guardian*, Saturday 4 June
- Anthias, F. & Yuval-Davis, N. (1992) *Racialized boundaries: race, nation, gender, colour and class and the anti-racist struggle*. London and New York: Routledge
- Apple, M. (1999) The Absent presence of race in Educational reform. *Race ethnicity and education*, 2 (1), pp. 9-16
- Appleyard, B. & White, L. (2004) The Ghetto's in the Mind. *The Sunday Times Magazine* Sunday 10 October
- Archer, L. & Francis, B. (2005) 'They never go off the rails like other ethnic groups': teachers' constructions of British Chinese pupils' gender identities and approaches to learning. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 26 (2), pp.165-182
- Assistant Masters and Mistresses Association (1987) *Multi-cultural and Anti-racist education today*. London: AMMA
- Back, L. (1996) *New ethnicities and urban culture: racisms and multiculturalism in young lives*. London: University College London Press
- Ball, S. (1981) *Beachside Comprehensive: a case-study of secondary schooling*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Barbieri, A. (2004) Hoodlums and hoods. Comment, *The Guardian*, Thursday 18 November
- Barnard, N. (1997) Exclusion linked to paperwork, *Times Educational Supplement*, Friday 7 November
- BBC (2003) *New tables reveal school 'value'*. Thursday 4 December
[//news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/3289279.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/3289279.stm) (accessed 19/05/06)
- Bentham, J. (2000) *Minority Ethnic Issues in Social Exclusion and Neighbourhood Renewal*. The Social Exclusion Unit. www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/seu/ (accessed 17/07/01)
- Bernstein, B. (1971) *Class, Codes and Control*. Volume 1. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul
- Berthoud, R., Modood, T. & Smith, P. (1997) Introduction. Chapter 1. In T. Modood & R. Berthoud (Eds.) *Ethnic Minorities in Britain: diversity and disadvantage*. London: Policy Studies Institute
- Bhavnani, R., Mirza, H. S. & Meeto, V. (2005) *Tackling the roots of racism: lessons for success*. Bristol: Policy Press
- Birmingham Metropolitan Council (1994) *Report to the Birmingham Education Services and Special Needs Sub-Committee 28 June 1994 – Baseline Assessment for the Primary*

References

- Phase, Autumn 1993, Analysis of Results.* Birmingham: Birmingham Metropolitan Council
- Blair, M. (1998) The myth of neutrality. In P. Connolly & B. Troyna (Eds.) *Researching Racism in Education: politics, theory and practice*. Buckingham: Open University Press
- Blair, T. (2004) Speech made to the Fabian Society. Wednesday 7 July, Institute of Education: London
- Blair, T. (2005) Downing Street election announcement. Tuesday 5 April. BBC News
- Blunkett, D. (1997) Forward by the Secretary of State. In Department for Education and Employment (1997) *op.cit.*
- Blunkett, D. (1999) *Ethnic minority pupils must have the opportunity to fulfil their potential.* www.dfes.gov.uk (accessed 20/10/99)
- Blyth, E. & Milner, J. (Eds.) (1996) *Exclusion from school: Inter-professional issues for policy and practice*. London: Routledge
- Blyth, E. & Milner, J. (1996) Black boys excluded from school: Race or masculinity issues? In E. Blyth & J. Milner (Eds.) *op.cit.*
- Boaler, J. (1997) *Experiencing school mathematics: Teaching styles, sex and setting*. Buckingham: Open University Press
- Bonnett, A. & Carrington, B. (2000) Fitting into Categories or Falling Between Them? Rethinking Ethnic Classification. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 21 (4)
- Bourdieu, P. (1986a) *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste*. London: Routledge
- Bourdieu, P. (1986b) The Forms of Capital. In J. G. Richardson (Ed.) *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*. London and New York: Greenwood Press
- Bourdieu, P. (1992) *In Other Words: Essays toward a Reflexive Sociology*. London: Polity Press
- Bourdieu, P. (1993) *The field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*. Cambridge: Polity
- Bourdieu, P. & Passeron, J-C. (1990) *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*. 2nd Edition. London: Sage Publications
- Bourne, J., Bridges, L. & Searle, C. (1994) (Eds.) *Outcast England: how schools exclude Black pupils*. London: Institute of Race Relations
- Bridges, L. (1994) Exclusions: how did we get here? In J. Bourne, L. Bridges & C. Searle (Eds.) *Outcast England: how schools exclude Black pupils*. London: Institute of Race Relations
- Brown, D. (2001) New school laws will get tough with pupils and parents. *The Guardian*, Monday 9 July
- Brown, G. (2005) *The future of Britishness*. Speech to the Fabian Society. 14th January
- Casares, A.M. (2005) Free and freed black African in Granada in the time of the Spanish Renaissance. In T.F. Earle & K.J.P. Lowe (Eds.) *op.cit.*

References

- Cashmore, E. (1994) *Dictionary of Race and Ethnic Relations*. 3rd Edition. London and New York: Routledge
- Channer, Y. (1995) *I am a promise: The school Achievement of British African Caribbeans*. Stoke On Trent: Trentham Books
- Clare, J. (2000) Girls widen the grades gap in every subject. *The Daily Telegraph*, 24 August
- Clarke, C. (1999) *Improved standards for ethnic minority pupils will be our lasting response to Lawrence inquiry*. www.dfes.gov.uk (accessed 23/10/99)
- Coard, B. (1971) *How the West Indian Child is Made Educationally Subnormal in the British School System*. London: New Beacon Books
- Coffield, F. & Vignoles, A. (1997) NCIHE: Widening participation in higher education by ethnic minorities, women and alternative students, Report 5, Section 1. In R. Dearing (Ed.) *The National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education: Summary Report*. Britain: Crown Copyright
- Cohen, S. (2002) *Folk devils and moral panics: The creation of the Mods and Rockers*. 3rd Edition. London: Routledge
- Commission for Racial Equality (1989) *Code of practice for the elimination of racial discrimination in Education*. CRE publications texts. www.cre.gov.uk (accessed 31/05/01)
- Commission for Racial Equality (1997) *Ethnic minority women*. CRE Factsheets. www.cre.gov.uk (accessed 3/07/01)
- Commission for Racial Equality (1998) CRE's closing submission to part 1 of the Inquiry. In The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry. www.cre.gov.uk (accessed 15/08/04)
- Commission for Racial Equality (2001) *Statutory code of practice on the duty to promote race equality: A guide for schools*. Consultation Draft. www.cre.gov.uk (accessed 19/12/01)
- Connolly, P. (1998) 'Dancing to the wrong tune': ethnography, generalisation and research on racism in schools. P. Connolly & B. Troyna (Eds.) *op.cit.*
- Connolly, P. (1998) *Racism, Gender Identities and Young Children: social relations in a multi-ethnic inner-city primary school*. London: Routledge
- Connolly, P. & Troyna, B. (1998) (Eds.) *Researching Racism in Education: Politics, theory and practice*. Buckingham: Open University Press
- Cook, C. & Barker, L.M. (1981) (Eds.) *Pears Cyclopaedia*, 90th Edition. London: Pelham Books
- Cork, L. (2005) *Supporting Black pupils and parents: understanding and improving home-school relations*. London: Routledge
- Cullingford, C. & Morrison, J. (1996) Who excludes whom? The personal experience of exclusion. In E. Blyth & J. Milner (Eds.) *op.cit.*
- Curtis, P. (2004) Teachers take action against league tables. *The Guardian*. Thursday 8 April
- Daily Mail (2003) Teachers criticise new look tables. Thursday 23 January

References

- Davies, N. (2000) Fiddling the facts and figures in the struggle for success. *The Guardian*, Tuesday 11 July
- Deal, S. (2005) College bans hijabs and hoodies in security row. *The Metro*, Thursday 24 November
- Delgado, R. & Stefancic, J. (2001) *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*. New York and London: New York University Press
- Demaine, J. (1989) Race, Categorisation and Educational Achievement. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 10 (2), pp.195-214
- Department for Education (DfE) (1993) *A new deal for 'out of school' pupils*. DfE News 126/93
- Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) (1996) *The National Curriculum*. www.dfes.gov.uk (accessed 8/09/00)
- Department for Education and Employment (1997) *Excellence in Schools: White Paper*. Cm 3681. London: The Stationery Office
- Department for Education and Employment (1999a) *Social Inclusion: Pupil Support*. Circular 10/99. London: DfEE
- Department for Education and Employment (1999b) *Improved standards for ethnic minority pupils will be our lasting response to Lawrence inquiry – Clarke*. News 110/99. London: DfEE
- Department for Education and Employment (1999c). *Letter to Chief Education Officers covering the Standards Fund: Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant*. www.dfes.gov.uk (accessed 28/01/99)
- Department for Education and Employment & Qualifications & Curriculum Authority (DfEE) (1999d) *The National Curriculum: Handbook for primary teachers in England, Key Stages 1 and 2*. London: DfEE & QCA
- Department for Education and Employment & Qualifications & Curriculum Authority (DfEE) (1999e) *The National Curriculum: Handbook for primary teachers in England, Key Stages 3 and 4*. London: DfEE & QCA
- Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) (1999f) *Schools extending excellence: Excellence in Cities*. Report March 1999 to September 2000. London: DfEE
- Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) (2000a) *Secondary schools: performance tables*. Lambeth 208. Issue 11/00. London: DfEE
- Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) (2000b) *EiC Schools extending excellence: Excellence in Cities*. Report March 1999 to September 2000. www.dfes.gov.uk (accessed 12/02/01)
- Department for Education and Skills (DfES) (2001a) *Permanent exclusions from schools, England 1999/2000*. SFR 32/2001
- Department for Education and Skills (DfES) (2001b) *Schools Achieving Success: White Paper*. www.dfes.gov.uk accessed 19/11/01
- Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) (2001c) *Youth Cohort Study: the activities of*

References

- experiences of 16 year olds: England and Wales*. SFR 02/2001. London: DfEE
- Department for Education and Skills (DfES) (2003a) *Aiming High: Raising the Achievement of African-Caribbean Pupils*. London: DfES
- Department for Education and Skills (DfES) (2003b) *Statistics Education: Permanent exclusions from maintained schools in England*. Issue No. 08/03 www.dfes.gov.uk (accessed 10/05/04)
- Department for Education & Skills (DfES) (2004a) *National Curriculum Assessment, GCSE and Equivalent Attainment and Post-16 Attainment by Pupil Characteristics in England*, 2004. London: DfES
- Department for Education and Skills (DfES) (2004b) *Permanent exclusions from maintained schools in England, 2002/2003*. SFR 42/2004 London: DfES
- Department for Education and Skills (DfES) (2004c) *Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners*. London: TSO
- Department for Education & Skills (DfES) (2005a) *National Curriculum Assessment, GCSE and Equivalent Attainment and Post-16 Attainment by Pupil Characteristics in England*, 2005. London: DfES
- Department for Education and Skills (DfES) (2005b) *Permanent and Fixed Period Exclusions from Schools and Exclusion Appeals in England, 2003/04*. London: DfES
- Department for Education and Skills (DfES) (2005c) *Higher Standards, Better Schools For All: More choice for parents and pupils*. White Paper, CM6677. London: The Stationery Office
- Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR) (2001) *Addressing the housing needs of Black and minority ethnic people*. DTLR Action Plan. London: DTLR
- Donald, J. & Rattansi, A. (1992) (Eds.) *'Race', culture & difference*. London: Sage
- Drew, D. & Gray, J. (1991) The black-white gap in examination results: a statistical critique of a decade's research. *New Community*, 17 (2), pp. 159-172
- DuBois, W.E.B. (1996) *The souls of Black folk*. London: Penguin Books
- Dumais, S. (2002) Cultural Capital, gender and school success: the role of habitus. *Sociology of Education*. 75, January, pp. 44-68
- Earle, T.F. & Lowe, K.J.P. (2005) *Black Africans in Renaissance Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- East, P. (2006) *Multiverse: Initial Teacher Education Professional Resource Network*. Paper presented at Multiverse: Making a Difference conference. Friday 5 May, London
- Ellison, R. (1965) *The invisible man*. London: Penguin Books
- Ethnic Minority Employment Task Force (2004) *Equality. Opportunity. Success*. Year 1 Progress Report. London: Department for Work and Pensions
- Excellence in Cities (2000) *What's happening in the Lewisham partnership*. Issue 1, Summer. London: Lewisham Education and Culture

References

- File, N. & Power, C. (1981) *Black settlers in Britain, 1555-1958*. London: Heinemann
- Fordham, S. (1988) Racelessness as a factor in Black students' school success: pragmatic victory or pyrrhic victory? *Harvard Educational Review*, 58 (1)
- Fordham, S. (1996) *Blacked out: dilemmas of race, identity and Success at Capital High*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press
- Foster, P. (1990) Cases not proven: an evaluation of two studies of teacher racism. *British Educational Research Journal*. 16 (4), pp. 335-349
- Foster, P. (1993) 'Methodological purism' or 'a defence against hype'? Critical readership in research in 'race' and education. *New Community*, 19 (3) pp. 547-552
- Foster, P., Gomm, R. & Hammersley, M. (1996) *Constructing educational inequality*. London: Falmer Press
- Foucault, M. (1984) Disciplines and sciences of the individual. In P. Ravinow (Ed.) *The Foucault Reader: an introduction to Foucault's thought*. London: Penguin Books
- Friere, P. (1993) *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. London: Penguin Books
- Fuller, M. (1984) Black girls in a London comprehensive school. In M. Hammersley & P. Woods (Eds.) *Life in school: the sociology of pupil culture*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press
- Gaine, C. & George, R. (1999) *Gender, 'Race', and Class in Schooling: A New Introduction*. London: Falmer Press
- German, G. (1996) Anti-racist strategies for educational performance: facilitating successful learning for all children. In K.N. Dwivedi & V.P. Varma (Eds.) *Meeting the needs of ethnic minority children*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers
- Gibson, A. & Barrow, J. (1986) *The Unequal Struggle*. London: Centre for Caribbean Studies.
- Giddens, A. (1985) Time, space and regionalisation. In D. Gregory & J. Urry (Eds.) *Social Relations and Spatial Structure*. London: Macmillan
- Gill, D., Mayor, B. & Blair, M. (1992) (Eds.) *Racism and Education: Structures and Strategies*. London: Sage
- Gill, B. (1998) Identities and education: new myths and new ethnicities. *Multicultural Teaching*, 16 (3), pp. 15-17
- Gillborn, D. (1990) 'Race' *Ethnicity and Education: Teaching and Learning in Multi-ethnic Schools*. London: Unwin Hyman
- Gillborn, D. (1995) *Racism and antiracism in real schools: theory, policy, practice*. Buckingham: Open University Press
- Gillborn, D. (1997) Young, black and failed by school: the market, education reform and black students. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 1 (1), pp.65-87
- Gillborn, D. (1998) Racism and the politics of qualitative research: learning from controversy and critique. In P. Connolly & B. Troyna (Eds.) *op.cit.*

References

- Gillborn, D. (1998) Racism, selection, poverty and parents: New Labour, old problems? *Journal of Education Policy*, 13 (6), pp. 717-735
- Gillborn, D. (1999) Fifty years of Failure: 'Race' and Education Policy in Britain. In A. Hayton (Ed.) *Tackling Disaffection and Social Exclusion: Education Perspectives and Policies*. London: Kogan Page
- Gillborn, D. & Drew, D. (1993) The politics of research: some observations on "methodological purity". *New Community*, 19 (2) pp.354-360
- Gillborn, D. & Gipps, C. (1996) *Recent research on the Achievements of Ethnic Minority Pupils*. London: Ofsted
- Gillborn, D. & Mirza, H.S. (2000) *Educational Inequality: mapping race, class and gender*. London: Ofsted
- Gillborn, D. & Youdell, D. (2000) *Rationing Education: Policy, practice, reform and equity*. Buckingham: Open University Press
- Gilman, S. (1999) Black bodies, white bodies: toward an iconography of female sexuality in late nineteenth-century art, medicine and literature. In J. Donald & A. Rattansi (Eds.) *'Race', culture and difference*. London: Open University Press with Sage Publications
- Gilroy, P. (1987) *There ain't no black in the Union Jack*. London: Routledge
- Green, M. & Grosvenor, I. (1997) Making Subjects: History-writing, Education and Race categories. *Paedagogica Historica*, 33 (3), pp. 883-908
- Grenfell, M. & James, D. (2004) Change in the field – changing the field: Bourdieu and the methodological practice of educational research. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 25 (4) September, pp. 507-523
- Grenfell, M. & James, D. (1998) *Bourdieu and Education: Acts of practical theory*. Abingdon, Oxon: RoutledgeFalmer
- Grosvenor, I. (1997) *Assimilating Identities: Racism and Educational Policy in Post 1945 Britain*. London: Lawrence & Wishart
- Halle, T G, Kurtz-Costes, B & Mahoney J L (1997) Family Influences on School Achievement in Low-Income, African American Children. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 89 (3), pp. 527-537
- Hall, S. (1990) The Whites of Their Eyes: racist ideologies and the media. In M. Alvarado & J. Thompson (Eds.) *The Media Reader*. London: British Film Institute
- Hall, S. (1992) New Ethnicities. In J. Donald & A. Rattansi (Eds.) *op. cit.*
- Hall, S. (2002) Paper presented at *Beyond the Rhetoric: 25 years of the CRE.*, London, May
- Hallan, V.K. (1994) Whose ethnicity is it anyway? *Multicultural Teaching*. 13 (1), pp.14-16
- Hammersley, M. (1993) On methodological purism: a response to Barry Troyna. *British Educational Research Journal*, 19 (4), pp. 339-341
- Hammersley, M. (1998a) *Reading ethnographic research*. London: Longman

References

- Hammersley, M. (1998b) Partisanship and credibility: the case of antiracist educational research. In P. Connolly & B. Troyna (Eds.) *op.cit.*
- Hammersley, M. (1999) Taking sides against research: an assessment of the rationales for partisanship. In D. Scott (Ed.) *Values and educational research*. Bedford Way Papers, Institute of Education: London
- Hammersley, M. & Atkinson, P. (1983) *Ethnography: principles in practice*. London: Tavistock Publications
- Hardy, J. & Vieler-Porter, C. (1992) Race, schooling and the 1988 Education Reform Act. In D. Gill, B., Mayor & M. Blair (Eds.) *op. cit.*
- Haskey, J. (1997) Population review: (8) *The ethnic minority and overseas-born populations of Great Britain*. London: Office for National Statistics
- Henry, A. (1998) 'Invisible and womanish': Black girls negotiating their lives in an African-centred school in the USA. *Race ethnicity and education*, 1 (2), pp.151-170
- Herrnstein, R.J. & Murray, C. (1994) *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and class structure in American Life*. New York and London: Free Press
- Hinsliff, G. & Bright, M. (2000) Black youth culture blamed as pupils fail. *The Observer*, Sunday 20 August
- Holt, J. (1990) *How children fail*. London: Penguin
- Home Office (2005) *Improving Opportunity, Strengthening Society: The Government's strategy to increase race equality and community cohesion*. London: Race, Cohesion, Equality and Faith Directorate
- hooks, b. (1991) *Yearning: race, gender and cultural politics*. London: Turnabout
- Hope Franklin, J. & Moss, A. (1993) *From slavery to freedom: a history of Negro Americans*. New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc.
- Howitt, D. & Owusu-Bempah, J. (1994) *The Racism of Psychology: time for change*. Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf
- John, P. (1996) Damaged goods? An interpretation of excluded pupils' perceptions of schooling. In E. Blyth & J. Milner (Eds.) *op.cit.*
- Johnson, S.T (1992) Extra-School Factors in Achievement, Attainment and Aspiration Among Junior and Senior High School-Age African American Youth. *Journal of Negro Education*. 61 (1)
- Kalmijn, M. & Kraaykamp, G. (1996) Race, Cultural Capital and schooling: An analysis of trends in the United States. *Sociology of Education*. 69 (January), pp. 22-34
- Kellner, P. (1998) Capital's ethnic workers earn 20% less than whites, *Evening Standard*, Friday 6 November
- Kelly, A. (2000) Fear of racist label hampers teachers, *Times Educational Supplement*, Friday 15 December
- Kelly, J. (2004) Out for the count. *The Guardian*, Tuesday 11 May

References

- Kendall, L., Rutt, S. & Schagen, I. (2005) *Minority ethnic pupils and Excellence in Cities: Final Report*. London: National Foundation for Educational Research
- Kingston, P. (1998) Want to be a role model? *Guardian Higher*, Tuesday 27 October
- Kysel, F. & West, A. (1992) Leaving school: attitudes, aspirations and destinations of fifth-year leavers in Tower Hamlets. *Educational Research*, 34 (2)
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1998) Just what is critical race theory doing in a nice field like education? In G. Ladson-Billings & D. Gillborn (Eds.) (2004) *The RoutledgeFalmer Reader in Multicultural Education*. London: RoutledgeFalmer
- Lahey, J. (1997) Neighbourhoods and Housing. In T. Modood & R. Berthoud (Eds.) *op.cit.*
- Lareau, A. & McNamara Horvat, E. (1999) Moments of Social Inclusion and Exclusion: Race, Class and Cultural Capital in Family-School Relationships. *Sociology of Education* 72, January, pp. 37-53
- LeCompte, M. D. (1987) Bias in the biography: Bias and subjectivity in Ethnographic Research. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 18, pp. 43- 52
- Lee, H. (1960) *To kill a Mockingbird*. London: Heinemann Educational Books
- Leonardo, Z. (2002) The Souls of White Folk: critical pedagogy, whiteness studies, and globalization discourse. *Race Ethnicity and Education*. 5 (1), pp. 29-50
- Lewisham Education and Community Services (undated) *Statutory tests in Lewisham schools: Information for parents*. Leaflet. Lewisham: Lewisham Education and Community Services
- Lowe, K. (2005) The stereotyping of black Africans in Renaissance Europe. In T.F. Earle & K.J.P. Lowe (Eds.) *op cit.*
- Mac an Ghaill, M. (1988) *Young, gifted and black*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press
- MacDonald, J. (2001) *Portraits of Black achievement: composing successful careers*. Trowbridge: Lifetime Careers Publishing
- Macdonald, I., Bhavnani, R., Khan, L. & John, G. (1989) *Murder in the playground: The Burnage Report*. London: Longsight Press
- Machin, S., McNally, S. & Meghir, C. (2005) *Excellence in Cities: evaluation of an education policy in disadvantaged areas*. London: Excellence in Cities Evaluation Consortium.
- Macpherson, W. (1999) *The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry*. London: The Stationery Office
- Malik, R. (1997) Separate but equal, *Guardian Education*, Tuesday 16 December
- Mama, A. (1995) *Beyond the Masks: race, gender and subjectivity*. London: Routledge
- Manning, S. (2006) League tables push pupils to easy options. *Times Educational Supplement*. Friday 13 January
- May, S. (1999) Critical multiculturalism and cultural difference: avoiding essentialism. In S. May (Ed.) *Critical multiculturalism: rethinking multicultural and antiracist education*. London

References

- and Philadelphia: Falmer Press
- Milner, D. (1975) *Children and race*. Harmondsworth: Penguin
- Mirza, H.S. (1986) Black girls and the Swann report. *Multi-cultural Education Review*, 5, Spring, pp. 39-40
- Mirza, H.S. (1992) *Young, Female and Black*. London: Routledge
- Mirza, H.S. (1997a) (Ed.) *Black British Feminism*. London: Routledge
- Mirza, H.S. (1997b) Black women in education: A collective movement for social change. In H.S. Mirza (Ed.) *op.cit.*
- Mirza, M. (1998) 'Same voices, same lives?' revisiting black feminist standpoint epistemology. In P. Connolly & B. Troyna (Eds.) *op.cit.*
- Modood, T. (1993) *Not easy being British: Colour, culture and citizenship. Liberalism, Multiculturalism and Toleration*. Basingstoke: Macmillan
- Modood, T. (1997) Culture and Identity. In T. Modood & R. Berthoud (Eds.) *op.cit.*
- Modood, T. & Berthoud, R. (1997) (Eds.) *Ethnic Minorities in Britain: diversity and disadvantage*. London: Policy Studies Institute
- Moore, R. (2004) Cultural capital: objective probability and the cultural arbitrary. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*. 25 (4), September, pp. 445-456
- Nazroo, J. (1997a) *The Health of Britain's Ethnic Minorities*. London: Policy Studies Institute.
- Nazroo, J. (1997b) Health and Health Services. In T. Modood & R. Berthoud (Eds.) *op.cit.*
- Nixon, J. (1985) *A teacher's guide to Multicultural education*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Limited
- Office for National Statistics (1991) *1991 Census: England*. London: HMSO
- Office for National Statistics (2001a) *Census 2001: England*. London: HMSO
- Office for National Statistics (2001b) *People & Migration; Ethnicity*. www.statistics.gov.uk (accessed 14/03/06)
- ONS (2004) www.statistics.gov.uk/cc/nugget.asp?id=457 (accessed 17/07/04)
- Ofsted (1994) *Educational support for minority ethnic communities: a survey of educational provision funded under Section 11 of the 1966 Local Government Act*. April 1992-November 1993. 130/94/NS. London: Ofsted
- Ofsted (1999) *Raising the attainment of minority ethnic pupils: School and LEA responses*. London: Ofsted
- Ofsted (2001) *Improving Attendance and Behaviour in Secondary Schools*. London: Ofsted
- Ofsted (2002a) *Achievement of Black Caribbean Pupils: Three successful primary schools*. London: HMSO
- Ofsted (2002b) *Achievement of Black Caribbean Pupils: Good practice in secondary schools*.

References

- London: HMSO
- Olser, A. (1997) Exclusions drama turns into crisis for blacks. *Times Educational Supplement*, Friday 10 October
- Olser, A. (1999) The educational experiences and career aspirations of black and ethnic minority undergraduates. *Race ethnicity and education*, 1 (2), pp.39-58
- Ouseley, H. (1998) Black exclusions scandal, *Times Educational Supplement*, Friday 18 December
- Owen, G. (2002) Middle-class pupils take over scheme for deprived, *The Times*, Thursday 11 April
- Parekh, B. (1992) The hermeneutics of the Swann Report. In D. Gill, B. Mayor & M. Blair (Eds.) *Racism and education: structures and strategies*. London: Sage
- Parsons, C. (1996) The cost of primary school exclusions. In E. Blyth & J. Milner (Eds.) *op. cit.*
- Pathak, S. (2000) *Race Research for the Future: Ethnicity in Education, Training and the Labour Market*. London: Crown Copyright
- Patterson, S. (1969) *Immigration and Race Relations in Britain, 1960-1967*. London: Institute of Race Relations
- Phoenix, A. (1994) Practising Feminist Research: The Intersection of Gender and 'Race' in the Research Process. In M. Maynard & J. Purvis (Eds.) *Researching women's' lives from a feminist perspective*. London: Taylor & Purvis.
- Pomeroy, E. (2000) *Experiencing exclusion*. Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books
- Race Relations Act 1976 Chapter 74. London: The Stationery Office Limited
- Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. London: The Stationery Office Limited
- Rattansi, A. (1992) Changing the subject? Racism, culture and education. In J. Donald & A. Rattansi (Eds.) *op. cit.*
- Rampton, A. (1981) *West Indian children in our schools*. London: HMSO
- Reay, D. (1996) *Bourdieu and cultural reproduction: using habitus and cultural capital to examine mothers' involvement in their children's primary school*. Paper presented to British Educational Research Association Annual Conference, University of Lancaster
- Reay, D. (1998) Cultural Reproduction: mothers' involvement in their children's primary schooling. In M. Grenfell & D. James (Eds.) *op. cit.*
- Rhamie, J. & Hallam, S. (2002) An Investigation into African-Caribbean Academic Success in the UK. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 5 (2), pp. 151-170
- Robson, C. (1999) *Real World Research*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Limited
- Rogers, C. (1979) *Carl Rogers on Personal Power: Inner strengths and its revolutionary impact*. London: Constable & Company Limited
- Rogers, C. (1983) *Freedom to Learn: for the 80s*. Ohio, USA: Bell & Howell Company

References

- Rollock, N. (1999) Racism, inequality and African Caribbean males: a case of history revisited. *Educational and Child Psychology*, 16 (3), pp. 30-36
- Rollock, N. (2005) Dressed to fail? Black male students and academic success. *Runnymede Bulletin*, June, No. 342
- Roth, P. (2000) *The Human Stain*. London: Vintage
- Rumbold, J. (2004) Mud slinging, *The Guardian*, Saturday 27 November
- The Runnymede Trust (2000) *The future of multi-ethnic Britain. The Parekh report*. London: Profile Books
- The Runnymede Trust (2003) *Complementing Teachers: a practical guide to promoting race equality in schools*. London: Granada
- Sanders, C. (2006) Tracker of talent with 200,000 in her sights. *Times Higher*, Friday 12 May
- Sanglin-Grant, S. & Schneider, R. (2000) *Moving on UP? Racial Equality and the Corporate Agenda: a study of FTSE 100 companies*. London: Schneider-Ross for the Runnymede Trust.
- Schlesinger, A. (1992) *The Disuniting of America: reflections on a multicultural society*. New York: W.W. Norton and Co.
- School Standards and Framework Act (1998) Chapter 31, Part 1, Chapter 1. The Stationery Office: London
- Schuman, J. (1999) The ethnic minority populations of Great Britain – latest estimates. *Population Trends* 96, pp.33-43
- Searle, C. (1996) The signal of failure: school exclusions and the market system of education. In E. Blyth & J. Milner (Eds.) *op.cit.*
- Seigner, R (1983) Parents' Educational Expectations and Children's Academic Achievements: A Literature Review. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly*, 29 (1)
- Sewell, T. (1997) *Black masculinities and schooling: how black boys survive modern schooling*. Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books
- Sewell, T. (2000a) Facilitating teacher and pupil action: Making PSE work for African Caribbean children. In M. Griffiths & G. Impey (Eds.) *Working Partnerships: Better research and learning*. Nottingham: The Nottingham Trent University
- Sewell, T. (2000b) Beyond Institutional Racism: Tackling the real problems of Black underachievement. *Multicultural Teaching*, 18 (2), pp. 27-33
- Sewell, T. (2000c) Identifying the pastoral needs of African Caribbean students: A case of 'critical anitracism'. *Education and Social Justice*, 3 (1)
- Shilling, C. (2004) Physical capital and situated action: a new direction for corporeal sociology. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 25 (4), pp. 473-487
- Sly, F., Thair, T. & Risdon, A. (1998) Labour market participation of ethnic groups. *Labour market trends*, December, pp. 601-615

References

- Social Exclusion Unit (1999) *Bridging the Gap: New Opportunities for 16-18 year olds not in education, employment or training*. London: Crown copyright
- Swann, M. (1985) *Education for all. Final report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Education of Children from Ethnic Minority groups*, Cmnd 9453. London: HMSO
- Taylor, M.J. (1981) *Caught between: A review of research into the education of pupils of West Indian origin*. Windsor, Berks: NFER-Nelson Publishing Company Ltd.
- Teacher Training Agency (TTA) (2000) *Raising the attainment of minority ethnic pupils*. London: TTA
- Teacher Training Agency (TTA) (2003a) *Annual report and financial statements: a review of the key achievements of, 2001/02*. London: TTA
- Teacher Training Agency (TTA) (2003b) *Operating Plan 2003-06*. London: TTA
www.tta.gov.uk/php/read.php?sectionid=21&articleid=107 (accessed 19/08/05)
- Teacher Training Agency (TTA) (2003c) *Race Equality Scheme*. www.tta.gov.uk (accessed 21/06/04)
- Teacher Training Agency (TTA) (2004) *Corporate plan 2004-2007*. www.tta.gov.uk (accessed 21/06/04)
- Tikly, L., Caballero, C., Haynes, J. & Hill, J. (2004) *Understanding the needs of mixed heritage pupils*. RR549. London: DfES
- Times Educational Supplement (1998) Racism fears as exclusions rise, *Editorial*, Friday 25 September
- Tomlinson, S. (1983) *Ethnic Minorities in British Schools: A review of the literature, 1960-82*. London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd.
- Troyna, B. (1984) Fact or artefact? The 'educational underachievement' of black pupils. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 5 (2)
- Troyna, B. (1987) Beyond multiculturalism: towards the enactment of anti-racist education in policy, provision and pedagogy. *Oxford Review of Education*, 13 (3), pp. 307-320
- Troyna, B. (1991) Children, 'race', and racism: the limitations of research and policy. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 39 (4), pp. 425-436
- Troyna, B. (1992) Can you see the join? A historical analysis of multicultural and antiracist education policies. In D. Gill, B. Mayor and M. Blair (Eds.) *op. cit.*
- Troyna, B. (1993) Children, 'race' and racism: the limitations of research and policy. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 39 (4), pp. 425-436
- Troyna, B. & Carrington, B. (1990) *Education, racism and reform*. London: Routledge
- Twoney, B. (2001) Labour Market participation of ethnic groups. *Labour Market Trends*, January, pp. 29-42
- Valli, L., Cooper, D. & Franks, L. (1997) Professional development schools and equity: A critical analysis of rhetoric and research. In M. Apple (Ed.) *Review of Research in Education*,

References

- Volume 22. Washington DC: American Educational Research Association
- Virdee, D. & William, T. (2003) *Focus on London*. London: Crown Copyright
- Wade, T.J. (1996) The relationships between skin color and self-perceived global, physical and sexual attractiveness and self-esteem for African-Americans. *The Journal of Black Psychology*, 22 (3), pp.358-373
- Walsh, D. (1998) Doing ethnography. In C. Seale (Ed.) *Researching society and culture*. London: Sage
- Westwood, S. (1990) Racism, Black masculinity and the politics of space. In J. Hearn & D.H.J. Morgan (Eds.) *Men, masculinity and social theory*. London and Winchester: Unwin Hyman
- White, A. (2002) (Ed.) *Social focus in brief: Ethnicity 2002*. London: Office for National Statistics
- Whitmarsh, A. & Harris, T. (1996) *Social Focus on Ethnic Minorities*. London: HMSO
- Williams, P.J. (1997) An Ordinary Brilliance: parting the waters, closing the wounds. Part of the *Genealogy of race...towards a theory of grace* series. The 1997 Reith Lectures. London: BBC Radio 4
- Willis, P. (1977) *Learning to labour: how working class kids get working class jobs*. Aldershot: Saxon House
- Wintour, P. & Bright, M. (2000) Fantasy football helps schoolboys score at maths. *The Observer*, Sunday 23 January
- Woods, P. (1990) *The happiest days?: How pupils cope with school*. Basingstoke: Falmer Press
- Woodward, W. (2000) Single-sex lessons to counter lad culture, *The Guardian*, Monday 21 August
- Woodward, W. (2001) Pressure mounts on schools failing target. *The Guardian*, Thursday 22 November
- Wright, C. (1986) School Processes – An Ethnographic study. In J. Eggleston, D. Dunn & M. Anjali (Eds.) *Education for Some: the educational and vocational experiences of 15-18 year old members of minority ethnic groups*. Stoke on Trent: Trentham
- Wright, C. (1987) Black students – white teachers. In B. Troyna (Ed.) *Racial Inequality in Education*. London: Tavistock
- Wright, C. (1992) *Race relations in the primary school*. London: David Fulton
- Wright, C. (1998) 'Caught in the crossfire': reflections of a black female ethnographer. In P. Connolly and B. Troyna (Eds.) *op.cit.*
- Youdell, D. (2003) Identity Traps or How Black Students Fail: the interactions between biographical, sub-cultural and learner identities. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 24 (1)
- Young, L (1996) The rough side of the mountain: Black women and representation. In Delia Jarrett-Macauley (Ed.) *Reconstructing Womanhood, Reconstructing Feminism*. London: Routledge

Appendix 1

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

2 July 2001

Dear

I apologise for having to trouble you in this way. I am writing to you with the recommendation of [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] both of whom, I understand you know.

I am a doctoral student at the Institute of Education carrying out research into how Black students become academically successful. I am currently in the position of trying to find a school that would be kind enough to agree to take part. Ideally, I would begin from the start of the next academic year.

I have enclosed a brief outline of the research and would welcome the opportunity to meet you to discuss my work further. I understand that you may be busy and will attempt to contact you by telephone should I not hear from you within 7 days of the date of this letter.

With many thanks

Yours sincerely

Nicola Rollock

Enc.

Appendix 1

How do Black students become academically successful?

The background

Traditionally, reports and studies focusing on young Black people describe failure, inadequacy or social difficulties. This is also the case within education. The aim of the research is to explore the school processes that facilitate the academic success of Black secondary school students, to understand how they perceive their educational experience. Particular attention will be paid to the nature of pupil-teacher relationships, peer relations and how these experiences differ in relation to gender.

It is envisaged that this insight will enable educators, researchers and policy makers to understand what works for academically successful Black children. Understanding these processes will not only ensure continuing support for these students but also, help teachers work constructively with those Black pupils who experience problems at school.

The research

The idea is to work within one mixed sex, multi-ethnic inner city secondary school, a couple of days each week over 2/3 terms. I aim to spend some time in classes, speaking with teachers and pupils at times convenient to the school and their workload. Every effort will be made to respect confidentiality - the names of the pupils, teachers and school will be changed for the final report. I will obviously be extremely happy to provide feedback to the school, again without disclosing particulars that might identify any individual.

Appendix 2

Metropolitan High School – Staff List

SMT, Headteacher	Ms Edwards
SMT (Gifted & Talented co-ordinator)	Mr Foster
SMT	Mrs Hempscott
SMT	Mrs Wright
Support	Ms Nicholson
Teacher	Mr Brown
Teacher	Ms Davidson
Teacher	Ms Taylor
Teacher	Mrs Fitzpatrick
Teacher	Ms Buckley
Teacher	Mrs Wilson
Teacher	Mr Bailey
Teacher	Mr Sanderson
Teacher	Mr Condon
Support	Ms Jones
Support	Ms Hill
Support	Ms Sinclair
Support	Ms Clarke
Support	Mrs Bellingham
Support	Ms Steiner
Support	Mrs Simmons

16 female staff
5 male

Above staff group included:

Learning mentors, Inclusion workers, Careers' Advisor, Head of English, Head of Science, Head of Maths, GNVQ Co-ordinator, PE teachers, Examinations' Officer, Key Stage 3 Strategy Manager

Appendix 2

Metropolitan High School – Pupil List

Ethnic Group categorisations based on school definitions:

BA – Black African; BAC – Black African Caribbean; BB – Black British; ESW – English, Scottish, Welsh; MR – Mixed Race; TC – Turkish Cypriot

Year 9 (plus predicted SATS results 2002)

Name	Ethnic Group	English	Maths	Science
Chantelle Fenton	BAC	5	5	3
Michelle Gregory	BB	6	6	5
Jacob Agyako	BA	4	5	4
Joseph Ofori	BA	5	6	5

Boys 2; Girls 2

Year 10 (plus SATS results 2001)

Name	Ethnic Group	English	Maths	Science
Paul Richards	BAC	5	6	6
Curtis Mayers	BB	N	6	5
Nadine Taylor	BAC	6	6	5
Tamika Amiaka	BAC	5	5	4
Natalie Davidson	BB	5	6	5
Danielle McCalla	BAC	5	5	5
Michelle Cobham	BAC	5	6	5
Samantha Phillips	ESW	5	7	6
Justin Soloman	TC	5	6	5
Jeremy Jones	ESW	5	7	7
Daniel Clark	ESW	5	7	6

Boys 5; Girls 6

Year 11 (plus SATs results 2000)

Name	Ethnic Group	English	Maths	Science
Natasha Wright	BAC	5	5	4
Michael McNamara	BAC	5	5	5
Maya Kelman	BAC	4	5	4
Nathan Johnson	BAC	6	5	4
Catherine Jackson	BB5	5	6	4
Efi Okpe	BA	6	7	6
Samuel Owusu	BA	5	7	5
Rob Davies	ESW	6	6	6
Nicole Adams	BO	5	5	4
Simon Daniels	MR	5	6	6

Boys 5; Girls 5

PUPIL QUESTIONS

Basic

- How long have you been at this school?
- What subjects are you studying/planning to choose?
 - a) What made you choose them?
 - b) Were there any subjects that you wanted to study, but couldn't?
 - c) Which is your favourite subject?
 - d) Which is your least favourite subject?
- Are you staying on to the sixth form? What are you planning to study?
If yes, what are your plans after that? If no, do you have any plans when you leave here?

Core

Descriptors of academic success

- As you know, you have been chosen for the study because I am looking at academic success.
 - a) How do you think teachers would describe academic success?
 - b) How would you describe it?
 - c) Do you think your friends would describe it in the same way?
- Prompt:* If I hadn't been told you and the other pupils were academically successful, how would I be able to tell you apart from other pupils?

- Does being academically successful mean you get treated differently by:
 - a) teachers?
 - b) Less successful pupils?
- Is it easier for some pupils to be academically successful than others?

Descriptors of non-success academically

- Can you think of a couple of pupils in your Year Group who you would say are not so successful academically?

Appendix 3a

- a) Why?
- b) Would teachers agree with your choice? Who would they choose?
- If you aren't academically successful, does this mean you get treated differently by:
 - a) teachers?
 - b) Academically successful pupils?
- What would these pupils have to do to be academically successful?

Popularity

- Which pupils are the most popular with other young people in their Year Group?
Follow-up: would teachers agree with you?
- Which pupils are the least popular with other young people in their Year Group?
Follow-up: would teachers agree with you?

Teachers

- Whose your favourite teacher?
Follow-up: Do other pupils agree?
- Which teacher do you like the least?
Follow-up: What do other pupils think of him/her?

Wrap-up

- Have you got any brothers or sisters? Are they at this school as well?
- And how many adults do you live with? Can you tell me who they are?
- Do they work? What do they do? Is anyone else in your house working?

Appendix 3b

- Confidentiality-names changed; no one else hears tape
- Tape to save writing, concentrate on conversation
- no right answers – interested in what they think

TEACHER QUESTIONS

Intro.: Some initial questions just to find out a bit about your role in the school.

Basic

How long have you been at this school?

What is your role here?

How would you describe this school to someone who has never been here?

How would you describe the school to a teacher?

What are your reasons for choosing this school to teach/work in?

What plans do you have for your future career path?

Core

Descriptors of academic success

- As you know, I am interested in academic success:
 - a) How would you define academic success?
 - b) How do you think other teachers would describe it? (School Management Team)
 - c) How do you think pupils would describe academic success?
- Think of a pupil who you would describe as academically successful – what in your opinion makes an academically successful pupil stand out from other pupils?

Prompt: How would I be able to tell an academically successful student from a less successful one?

- I am relatively new to this school, if I entered a class how would I be able to identify which pupils are academically successful, without talking to them?
- If you are academically successful, do you think this means that you get treated differently by:
 - a) School staff?
 - b) Less successful pupils?

Appendix 3b

- (You mentioned that you teach _____), in which curriculum areas would you say it is easier to become academically successful?

a) which curriculum areas is it harder to be academically successful?

Descriptors of non-success academically

- Would you say that some pupils find it harder to be academically successful than others?
Follow-up: For example, do you think it's easier for boys or girls to be academically successful?

- Think of someone in your Year Group who isn't academically successful – what would have to be changed to make him or her academically successful?

- If you aren't academically successful, does this mean you get treated differently by:

a) school staff?

b) academically successful pupils?

Popularity

- How would, as a teacher, describe popularity?
- How do you think pupils describe popularity?
- Which pupils, in your opinion/from a teacher's perspective, are most popular in the school?
- Which pupils (again from teacher's perspective) are the least popular?
- Can you be popular and academically successful?

End

As you know I am interested in understanding academic success, is there anything you would like to add?

Is there anything you would like to ask me?

Appendix 4a

'school address'

5 September 2002

Dear sir/madam

I am a researcher at the Institute of Education (University of London) doing a PhD looking at 'How students become academically successful'.

The research

I have been in the school since the Spring term talking to pupils in Years 9, 10 and 11 about their understanding of academic success. To do the research justice, I would now like to carry out the same process with teachers and support staff. I hope that the research will enable schools to provide continuing support to both students who are academically successful and those who find academic work difficult.

Interviews

I am conducting the research alongside a full-time job and am therefore unable to visit the school as frequently as I would like. I will be in school once a week, on either a Wednesday or Thursday at one of two time periods: 8.30am to 1pm or 1pm to 4pm. Specific times will be arranged in advance with staff, through 'name', my point of contact at the school. If there are any changes to this arrangement, they will be announced in advance in the weekly bulletin. Messages will also be passed on through 'contact'. I would like to interview a maximum of four people each week. Each interview will last approximately 30 minutes.

Confidentiality

All information, which is shared with me, will be treated as confidential. I hope to feedback general findings to the school, but no individuals will be identified. In addition, I will change all names and remove identifying information in my final report and all subsequent accounts of the project.

The list of people, I would like to interview is attached. If you are not on the list and would like to talk to me, please contact me through 'name of contact'. If you have any questions about the research, please direct them in the first instance to 'name of contact'.

Thank you in advance

Yours faithfully

Nicola Rollock

Academic success: Autumn term teacher interviews – beginning Monday 30th September

Please indicate your time and date preference on the grid below by
Friday 20th September. The interview will take approximately 45 minutes.

Tuesday 1st October

1pm – 1.45pm _____

1.50pm – 2.40pm _____

2.40pm – 3.30pm _____

3.45pm – 4.30pm _____

Tuesday 8th October

1pm – 1.45pm _____

1.50pm – 2.40pm _____

2.40pm – 3.30pm _____

3.45pm – 4.30pm _____

Tuesday 15th October

1pm – 1.45pm _____

1.50pm – 2.40pm _____

2.40pm – 3.30pm _____

3.45pm – 4.30pm _____

Half term

Tuesday 29th October

1pm – 1.45pm _____

1.50pm – 2.40pm _____

2.40pm – 3.30pm _____

3.45pm – 4.30pm _____

Tuesday 5th November

1pm – 1.45pm _____

1.50pm – 2.40pm _____

2.40pm – 3.30pm _____

3.45pm – 4.30pm _____

Wednesday 13th November

9.05am – 9.55am _____

9.55am – 10.45am _____

11.05am – 11.55am _____

11.55am – 12.45am _____

Tuesday 19th November

1pm – 1.45pm _____

1.50pm – 2.40pm _____

2.40pm – 3.30pm _____

3.45pm – 4.30pm _____

Thank you

Nicola Rollock



'school address'

28 January 2003

Dear [REDACTED]

Completion of fieldwork examining academic success.

I am writing to express my sincerest thanks to you and all staff who have so kindly given up time to speak with me for my doctoral research examining academic success.

I visited the school over a period of four terms alongside a full-time job and carried out approximately 45 interviews with both staff and pupils. I will spend much of the rest of this academic year transcribing and analysing the information. Next year I will begin the writing process. Aside from my thesis I will of course produce a summary report of my findings for 'name of school'.

I would in particular like to thank [REDACTED] in the office for handling my endless queries so efficiently; [REDACTED] for the frequent use of the library when I needed a quiet corner to speak with people; and, of course, [REDACTED] for acting as my contact, for helping me get the interviews started and for supporting me in addition to her own already packed workload. I am also grateful to the many staff I met and talked with during my periods in the staffroom for their warmth and friendliness.

I shall be in touch to keep you updated with my progress and look forward to presenting you with the report next year.

Yours sincerely

Nicola Rollock

SaveThe

Show your support:

*Visit www.savethehoodie.com

IMAGE REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES

www.savethehoodie.com

IMAGE REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES



IMAGE REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES

